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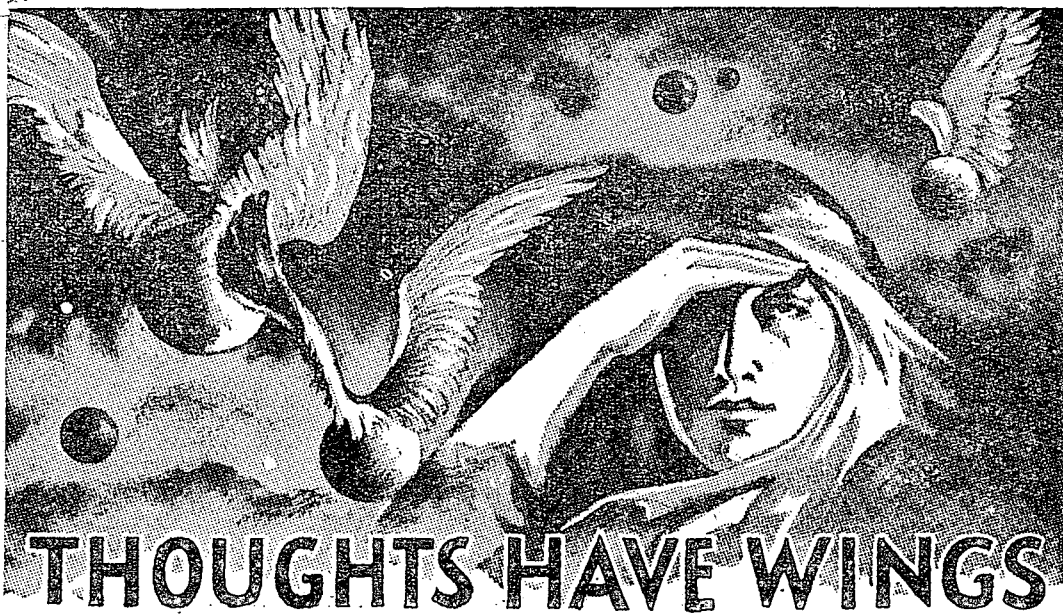
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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

LAST MONTH, after wading through L stacks of incredibly bad stories in search of saleable manuscripts, we took down our few remaining hairs and lit into the science-fiction writing fraternity. We did so with some misgivings; not because of what the authors themselves might say in rebuttal, but because the readers of *Amazing Stories* might become bored listening to what, at best, was no more than a private fight.

WE COULD have saved ourselves the worry! Within four days after the June issue reached the stands, our mail was bowing the legs of the entire mail-room staff. Compared to what the readers had to say, our beefs were the tender whisperings of young lovers! Some of the oldest—if not the most honored—names on stf contents pages got a going-over that would bring blushes to the weathered cheeks of Genghis Khan. One correspondent took the trouble to dig back several months into all issues of three stf publications. After boiling down the stories, he found only five that did not fit neatly into one of three basic plots! If that doesn't hammer home the point we raised, then what does?

IN ADDITION to the letters, there were I several phone calls, plus a telegram from an East Coast stf editor who commended us for putting into words something he'd been itching to say for years. Other letters agreed wholeheartedly with the column, then went on to say that by a strange coincidence the writer had just finished a story that was unique in plot and how soon could we send our check....

WELL, IT WAS a lot of fun while it lasted. And if out of all the turmoil one good story comes in that might never have been written had not the author set out to "show us", then the column served at least part of its purpose.

MENTION OF writers and writing M brings to mind one of the most

enjoyable reading experiences we've known in too long a time. An advance copy of the Shasta Publishers edition of Robert Heinlein's *THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON* came to us a few days ago. We went through it at one sitting, and for almost the first time we saw the *quality* science fiction can hold. Heinlein, like no one else we've read, can picture the world of tomorrow and convince you you're living it today. The "science" never overshadows the people in these stories, but it's there just the same, fed into the action and dialogue with a painlessness that takes the consummate skill only a truly fine writer can attain.

THE MAN AT the next desk, a collar-ad character whose initials are Bill Hamling, hasn't had much to say the past couple of days. It seems he's managed to get hold of a novel-length manuscript which he expects to put into *Fantastic Adventures* a couple of issues from now. It was written by some comparatively unknown writer, we understand; some chap by the name of L. Ron Hubbard. According to what little information we can pry out of Mr. Hamling, this Hubbard is right in there and may end up making a name for himself. We're always happy to see a newcomer break into print; but only a real ovation by the readers can keep him there.

BEFORE WE shut up shop for the B month, a few words about this issue are in order, we think. Of the nine stories it contains, six are by authors appearing for the first time in these pages. Fredric Brown, a fast man with a typewriter, gives you "From These Ashes..." He also writes detective novels—a fact that endears him especially to your editor. The others to get their foot in the door are: Graham Doar, Russell Branch, Franklin Gregory, Roger Flint Young and John Bridger. Of them all, our opinion (for what that's worth) is that Graham Doar gets this month's laurel sprig. Costello, Williams, and McGivern are in the act, too—just to make sure everybody's happy.

—HB

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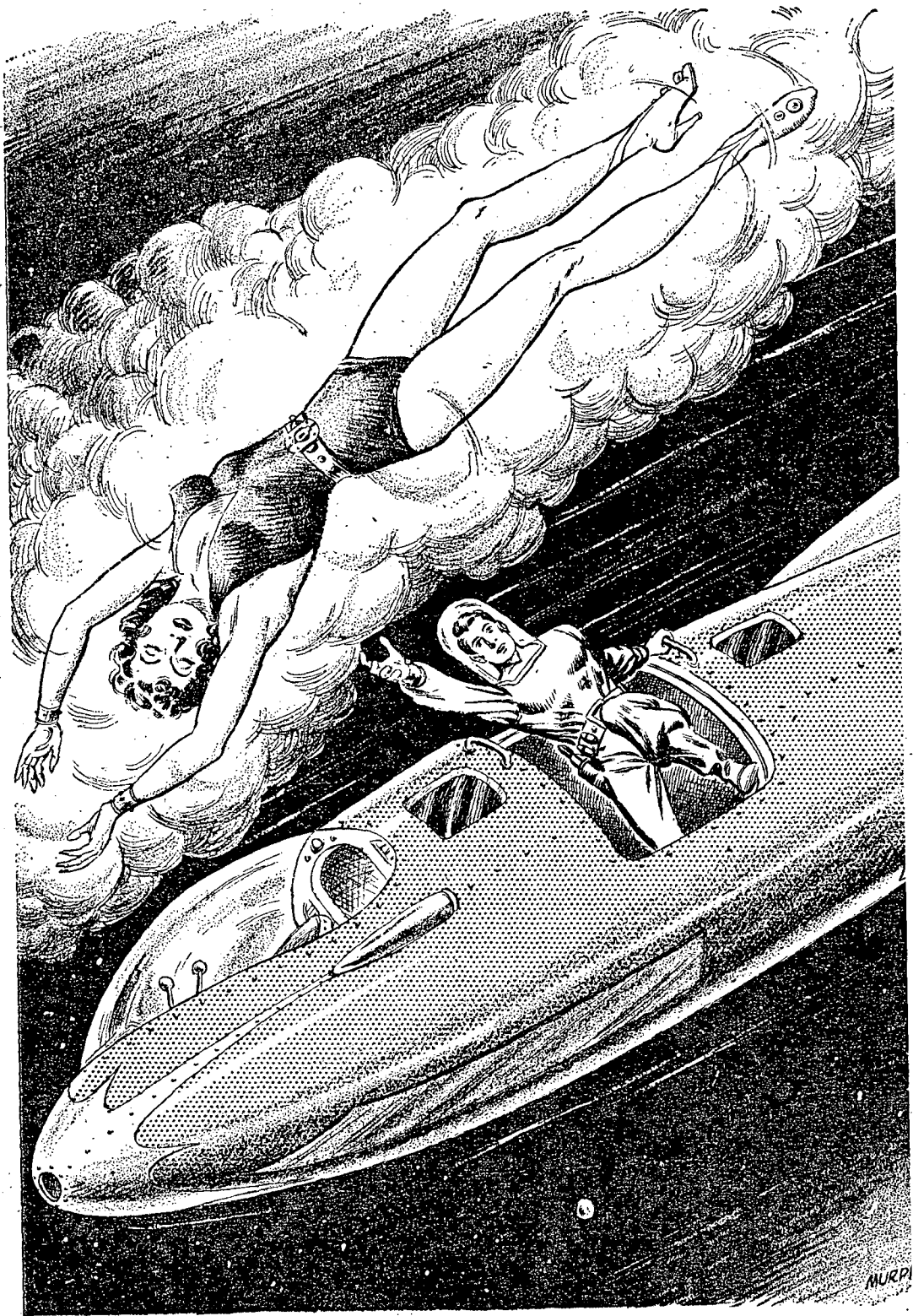
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VICTIMS of the VORTEX



By Clinton Ames

Even though he was doomed to endure a living death, Craig Terry saw no reason why the girl he worshiped must suffer the same fate

His reaching fingers seemed almost to touch her, but she appeared to be moving deeper into the cosmic dust clouds

JACK SPENCE planned murder. In his own heart he knew it, though his mind told him that it wouldn't actually be murder. How could it be murder if the victim lived?

Craig Terry wouldn't die. In fact, he might live years longer than he would otherwise. So Jack knew it wasn't murder he was planning.

Assuming an air of casualness he glanced around the area of the vast assembly floor within view of the door then slipped out. No one had seemed to be looking, and if they were they would think he was merely sneaking out in the yard for a smoke.

Outside, he lit a cigaret just to fulfill the illusion if anyone happened to follow him out. He took a deep drag and raised his face to the clear sky as he slowly exhaled.

Earth was just rising above the horizon, a rose-colored pearl on a velvet mat of blue-black speckled with diamonds and diamond dust. A gleaming dust mote on the rose-colored pearl was the Moon. Tomorrow the Moon would occult Earth and Mars, so nobody would come to work.

Jack decided he had waited long enough. No one was going to follow him out. He dropped the cigaret on the asphalt paving underfoot and went forward silently toward the parking lot.

The lone guard was in his shack with the door closed. There was little to worry about from him. He wouldn't be expecting anyone to come out two hours before quitting time and enter the parking area.

The cosmicars were in even lines, each ten feet from its neighbors, and in the exact center of a square whose sides were three inch white lines painted on the asphalt.

Craig Terry's was the 2563 U-80, a five-passenger job, and tight at the seams, thank God, or it would be murder. Some of the old hacks owned by the workers were leaky. It didn't matter ordinarily, because in the one to three minutes it took between Mars and Earth not enough air could leak out to cause discomfort.

Jack slipped past the guard's shack without being seen. As soon as he could, he slipped behind one of the

cosmicars where the guard couldn't see him even if he looked.

Now he was safe from discovery. He hastened down the lane between cars until he came to Craig's. The door was unlocked as he knew it would be. He slipped inside and let the door close enough so that from a distance it would appear shut.

He took out the small kit of tools he had brought for the purpose. What he planned to do was simplicity itself. The electron telescope was lined up on its carriage with the N-field generator axis. When the telescope brought the image of the destination onto the crosshairs on the image plate and the N-field stud was pushed down, every atom within the confines of the ship would polarize in that direction. Then when the Q charge was released from its storage condensers it would instantly convert every atom into a bundle of cosmic rays traveling toward the destination at light speed, holding together because they were traveling in the same direction.

By loosening the electron telescope and moving the vernier adjustment two degrees, the ship would miss not only its destination, but the Earth itself, and continue on into space.

If Craig were to notice it he would suspect what had happened instantly. But Craig would be tired and anxious to get home and dress up for his date with Bernice. He would drop into the driver's seat, quickly adjust the telescope, and press the N-field stud, and then the Q-relay stud.

After that it would be too late. Within minutes he would realize what had happened. But it would still be too late.

The pressing of the Q charge relay sent out a twenty-wave-deep plane of light a five-thousandth of a second before the car started. The plane of light stayed just ahead of the car,

struck the destination and reflected back to trigger the change back to ordinary matter.

Without a target for that plane of light to reflect from, the car would chase it forever. In five years it would be five light years from the Earth and still going. In a thousand years it might strike some body and stop the car.

He watched the delicate pointer creep over the seconds of arc to two degrees off center, then swiftly tightened the setscrews. The tools went back in their small leather case and into his pocket out of sight.

He left the car and reached the door to the factory building without seeing anyone. Pausing, he lit another cigaret, inhaled deeply and held it, dropped the cigaret on the asphalt and stepped on it. He opened the door boldly and stepped inside, exhaling smoke so that anyone who happened to be looking that way would draw the natural conclusion that he had just finished his smoke. The timing was right, too. Altogether it had taken no longer than it would have to smoke a cigaret.

HE CROSSED the material truck lane and entered the aisle between two assembly lines where the very things he had been working on in Craig's cosmicar were being assembled. On one line the electron telescopes were being assembled, on the other they were being attached to their N-field frame for later adjustment.

His mind was telling him to get back to his own bench. His heart was telling him to see Craig for one last time. Or perhaps it was vice versa.

But a compelling urge possessed him. He had to make sure that when Craig discovered what had happened he would know who had done it, and

why. So he continued on past the lane that led to his own department. He went on even though he knew there was a real risk of arousing Craig's suspicions so that he would examine his ship before starting home.

Craig was intent on his work and didn't see him approach. Jack watched him, sneering slightly, gloating in his thoughts.

"Hi, Craig," he said, bending over and leaning his elbows on the workbench.

"Hi, Jack," Craig said, without looking up. "What's on your mind?"

"I won't be riding home with you tonight," Jack said. "I need some extra dough, so I'm staying over and working the extra day."

"Need some money?" Craig asked, looking up with a friendly smile. "I can let you have some."

"Huh-uh," Jack said. "In the first place I'd have to pay it back—uh, tell you what, Craig. I won't be getting the pay for tomorrow for a week. Loan me fifty if you have it, and I'll pay you back then."

"Can't spare you that much, Jack," Craig said. "Would thirty help? I have fifty, but I'll need at least twenty for tonight."

"Yeah," Jack said. "To take my girl out."

"My girl," Craig corrected him with quiet earnestness. "That decision is not yours or mine to make, but hers. And she seems to prefer me. Why don't you forget it? All it'll do if you keep on being resentful is break up our friendship. And I value our friendship very highly, in case you don't know it already."

"If you dropped her she'd come back to me," Jack said.

"Maybe," Craig said.

"So all that keeps her from being my girl again is your insistence on going with her."

"Let's not discuss it any more," Craig said, taking out his billfold and counting out thirty dollars.

Jack took it, feeling an inner satisfaction in the knowledge that he'd never have to pay it back.

He'd stay over and work the extra day. Bernice would wonder why Craig didn't call for her. She'd read in the papers tomorrow that he hadn't arrived at Earth but had left Mars, and would know he'd missed, as an occasional too hasty driver did. She'd mourn for a week or two, then would be his again.

"Thanks," he said. "And I'll do you a favor now that you've loaned me this."

"You don't need to," Craig said. "I know you'd do the same for me."

"But maybe you'll like the favor I'm going to do for you," Jack smiled. "I'm not going to talk to you about Bernice being my girlfriend again."

"Swell," Craig said with relieved sincerity. "Dropping the subject will be good for both of us."

"I agree with you," Jack said. "Probably better for me than you. If I don't talk about it I won't brood about your stealing her from me."

"I didn't—!" Craig said, stopping at the realization that it would be better to let the subject drop. He shrugged and smiled good-naturedly. "Don't lose all that thirty in the poker game here tonight."

Jack gave Craig a grin of farewell, all the more satisfying because he knew it would be the last time he would see his rival. Then he turned and walked away.

THE WARNING whistle blew. Craig Terry took his time card out of the small drawer under the bench and inserted it under the timer, holding it there until a slight click told him it had been punched. He

put it back in the drawer and stood up, ready for the final whistle that would signal the end of the shift.

Others on all sides were doing the same. The noise of the great assembly plant was dying down to a murmur.

The final whistle blew. He joined a small group of friends heading toward the door to the parking lot.

"Going to the dance at Iwo Jima tonight?" one of them asked him.

"If the Moon's right," Craig said. His eyebrows lifted. "Say! It'll be just as good for Mongolia and they have real cooking there, besides the best dance bands in the world."

"That's right," the friend agreed. "It slipped me. See you there, huh? We can trade off on dances."

They passed through the door to the outside.

A minute later Craig dropped into the driver's seat of his cosmicar. He watched the image screen of the electron telescope while his hands manipulated the controls that brought first the western hemisphere, then a small area of the United States into view.

He waited until certain landmarks were just right, then pressed the N-field stud, took a deep breath, and touched the Q relay.

There was no sensation in being converted from matter to cosmic particles. Every atom and electrical particles of his being was transformed in the same instant, and because they remained unchanged relative to one another and to the ship, there was no sensation even of moving.

He leaned back in his seat. There would be two minutes and a few seconds before he would materialize a couple of miles above the ground and within a few hundred miles of home. Then he would start the jets and be home in a matter of minutes.

His eyes turned idly to glance out the side ports at the other cosmicars

speeding homeward. There would always be one or two that had started at the same instant. With five or six thousand leaving the parking lot in a matter of a few minutes it was a certainty. They would be within a mile until the last half a minute when they spread out in their straight line flight to their various targets.

But they weren't a mile away. There were four. And they were almost out of sight in the distance. Craig felt an impulse to look forward and see if he was headed right. But even if there had been an open port forward he couldn't have seen anything. Ordinary light would be shoved up into the ultraviolet bands.

He looked back at the other cars. They were drawing away, and at the rate they were receding either they or he was going to miss the Earth completely!

Suddenly they disappeared. In the twenty-fourth of a second it took for him to pass the Earth there wasn't time to even sense its passing.

A little whimper escaped his lips. The living death that was the fate of all careless drivers who missed their destination had been drilled into him too forcefully and too often by the Solar Safety Council for him not to know too well he was beyond hope.

Venus was too far around for any possibility of it being in the way to stop him. There was nothing! His course would curve a few degrees from the Sun's gravitational field. And then he would be out of the Solar System, hurtling onward into infinity at the speed of light.

Maybe someday he would meet something and reconvert into matter. But by then he would be so far away from the Earth that if he could still see it it would be like aiming at a fly on the back of a horse in Illinois from Mars.

He was lost. How had it happened? His eyes turned blankly to the electron telescope. How could he have erred so badly as to miss the Earth.

Suddenly he leaned forward and looked closely at the vernier adjustment. Realization trickled into his numbed thoughts.

"So it was Jack," he whispered. "I get it now. He did it so he could have a clear field with Bernice."

A harsh laugh exploded in the small confines of the cosmicar. It stopped, then exploded again, growing until it thundered in insane, hysterical glee.

"Jack killed me to get Bernice," he gasped, "and she wouldn't have him on a bet. She despises him because of his sneaky ways. That's why she broke off with him. But he doesn't know that. When he finds it out he'll have to live with the realization that he killed me for nothing."

He broke off with a gasp. He had suddenly remembered the loan of thirty dollars he had made to Jack Spence.

"Nothing," he said slowly, "except thirty pieces of silver." He dwelt on this thought for a long time, recalling the origin of the saying. Then he said fiercely, "I hope he kills himself from remorse. I couldn't have left him a more fitting parting 'gift'."

HE LET GO, allowing grief and despair to run their course until they were exhausted. He sobbed, his shoulders shaking, hot tears bathing his cheeks.

Slowly the gentle fingers of common sense crept in, calming his wrought thoughts and emotions. For all practical purposes he was dead. Yes. As dead as though his body were being readied for the funeral.

But the fact remained that he was still alive, and while he lived he had to live with himself, avoid pain, and

shun eventual death as long as possible.

He could live a long time if he conserved his resources wisely. His cosmicar contained standard emergency equipment which included an Airco Perpetual Air Renewer, together with two tanks of air replacement. It also was equipped with a ten year supply of concentrated food tablets and an automatic salvage unit with an electrosynthesizer.

He was glad now that he had never been careless about his cosmicar equipment.

Or was he glad? Wouldn't it have been better to have a few hours and then die because some of the equipment wasn't working? That way it would have been short. The way it was, he had nothing to look forward to but long years of solitude. Solitary confinement without even a book to help pass the time!

He built a picture of himself with one book, reading it until he knew it by heart, until he grew to hate it, until it became the very root of his existence. It was such a ludicrous picture that it brought a twisted smile to his lips.

He ran nervous fingers through his hair. That started another train of thought. He had no scissors. There was the electric razor though. He could keep cleanshaven, and maybe even manage to keep his hair trimmed clumsily with it.

He could build his happiness into a routine of little things like that. He would have to. Exercises to keep fit, a hundred little chores like shaving.

And then perhaps some day his cosmicar would encounter a big enough chunk of matter to trigger him back into the matter state. After that he could expand his horizons to the universe outside the ship.

Until he triggered back such a thing

was impossible. The space-time field he was existing in was tight. Along the line of flight through the material universe it was extremely thin, spreading out in all directions at right angles to that, so that his special universe was shaped like a thin watch.

Within his special universe everything was normal to everything else in it. There was, of course, energy leakage. Nearly all of this would be concentrated in the plane at right angles to his line of flight, where his space-time continuum was slightly compatible with that of the material universe, and the world-lines of his little universe didn't curve back. That leakage would be made up for longer than he would live by the atomic power of his automatic salvage unit.

That would be something to occupy the hours. Pondering over the theoretical aspects of his new existence.

He began to feel better.

Bernice suddenly rose in his mind. It was almost like a psychic projection. Her expression was one of sadness. It was so vivid it startled him. He glanced at his watch. Two hours had gone by already! He did some quick mental calculating. That would be roughly seven hours back on Earth.

It could be that she had just learned that he hadn't arrived home, and that it really was a psychic projection. It would have been interesting to find out. Such things did seem to happen at rare times. If it had really happened, then such phenomena would be independent of space-time fields. They would have to be for her psychic projection to have caught up with him when he was going at the speed of light.

He rubbed his chin with his fingers, felt the short stubble, and decided to kill a little time by shaving. He grinned. That would be one of his major occupations, shaving.

THE DAYS passed, sometimes swiftly, at other times slowly. Craig Terry spent long hours studying the mechanisms of the cosmicar that he had never familiarized himself with. Especially the one for triggering back to the matter state. It was his only hope of stopping. It died completely when he made sure of what he already knew, that it couldn't be tampered with with any tools he had. All he could do by touching it would be to render it inoperable so that he would forever remain cosmic rays. Then if he met any solid object he would be destroyed as his body plowed into and disintegrated everything in his path, acting as a dense concentration of cosmic rays.

It helped pass the time to get an idea on a possibility for stopping the ship and turning back while still within aiming distance of the Earth.

"Surely there must be some way," he said aloud in despair more than once. But there was no way, or else it would have been figured out and enclosed in the SSC guide book and instruction manual.

He took to spending long hours at the side viewports. It was interesting to watch. Often some small meteorite within a few thousand miles would flash by, appearing for a single instant as a straight line of light. The phenomenon of a nearby object seeming to be a straight line of light was due partly to the tremendous speed of the cosmicar, and partly due to the properties of curvature of the cosmicar's private space-time as it accepted the radiations and converted them to a normal relationship to stationary objects within that space-time.

And in the far distance was a big wheel of stars, a broad band whose limits were those of the compatibility of the two coordinate systems.

Sometimes the lines of light signal-

ling the passage of a meteorite were very close. There would be no danger from them, because if one came head on the plane of light ahead of the car would reflect from it and trigger the car back to matter that was at rest relative to the triggering body. Such a thing could take place any instant. But it was like waiting for a royal flush in poker.

As the days passed, the shock to Craig's mind wore off. He grew to think of his past life subconsciously as something remote and gone forever, like the days of childhood. The memory of Bernice grew dim. As he soon realized, his love for her had been a composite of things that weren't real love. It was made up partly of glamor from the fictitious competitive value of her affections created by Jack's wanting her, partly of her good looks and nice shape, and partly of the custom of accepting the fact that marriage to the nicest girl around was the thing to do as soon as she can be offered security.

Perhaps as a defense mechanism his memory brought up many little things about her that were far from desirable. Things he hadn't noticed before, or if he had he had shoved them into his subconscious quickly so they wouldn't disturb his dreams of happiness.

The day came when he realized to the full that from the standpoint of Bernice alone Jack might have done him a real favor.

With that realization he settled down to an acceptance of his fate. He turned his thoughts forward to the day when he would stop his flight across the universe and find himself in some alien system where there might be a habitable world.

It was entirely possible he would still be alive. His time rate, now that he was completely freed of the Solar System's space-time effects, was con-

siderably slower. How much slower he didn't know, but he knew that in free space his clock would show the passage of an hour or less for each twenty-four hours of Earth time. He might be several light-years away from the Earth already! That meant that from the standpoint of probability he would have fewer hours or years to wait for that moment when he found himself back in the space-time of the general universe, or he ceased to exist due to some accident.

Some minds when faced with a hopeless set of circumstances will crack quickly. Others seize the slimmest of hopes, the hope against hope hopes, and build them up to the proportions of certainty, basing their present happiness and future security on them. You read of the former every day in the newspaper as they leap from tall buildings, drink lethal concoctions, and play Russian roulette with a stacked gun. You meet the latter occasionally, and listen to their spirit of confidence with a sort of awe.

Craig had become one of the latter. Without realizing it he had plucked the impossible odds out of the depths of his despair and raised a solid structure of confidence on them. He forgot the Earth. He lived for the inevitable day when he would look out the side viewports of his cosmicar and see, not lines of light, but small dots, with perhaps the horizon of a new world with a blue sky. A place of adventure. A place to live.

He spent his waking hours dreaming of what it might be like, what kind of creatures might inhabit it, what he would do to adapt himself to his surroundings.

Some of his dreams were practical and conservative. Some were fantastic in the extreme.

Yet even the most fantastic and ab-

surd of his dreams fell far short of the reality when it came.

IT WAS A nebulous cloud of semi-luminous seething dust apparently fifty feet from the viewport of the cosmicar. For one dizzy instant Craig believed it had happened. He had been converted back into ordinary matter at last.

But three lines of light appeared and vanished in rapid succession. Undeniable evidence that he was still traveling at light speed.

Another explanation dawned on him. His hopes were dashed to pieces. What that seething cloud of dust had to be was debris from his cosmicar that had drifted away to the edge of the space-time field about him.

Stray atoms of ordinary matter had struck the impervium alloy shell and flaked off the paint in microscopic bits. It had accumulated within the space-time field until now, suddenly, he had noticed it.

There could be no other explanation. The origin of the slowly boiling cloud had to be the cosmicar itself. By no stretch of probability could anything external to the cosmicar in origin be going in the same direction and in the same plane perpendicular to his direction of flight.

The disappointment he experienced after his first burst of excitement dwindled. He stayed at the viewport studying the cloud.

He began to realize that it was a wonderful thing. It would give him hours of pleasure just to watch it. It was something outside his little cell of existence.

His imagination seized on it, built on it. By analogy he conceived of his little space-time system as being a universe in its own right, and there in that cloud was the beginning of miniature worlds.

He pictured that cloud as going through a sort of cosmic evolution on a small scale, developing star systems with planets, becoming a spiral nebula.

It remained there, stationary relative to the viewport, seeming to hold together by some force of its mass, while slowly swirling and boiling with a small scale grandeur.

Often lines of light signalling the passage of meteorites framed it on either side and behind it.

And time became an annoying thing that dragged Craig away from his fascinated study of its internal motions, to eat and to sleep.

But even in sleep the counterpart of that swirling mass came to visit him. And in those dreams a tinge of madness crept into his watching, causing him to imagine that by force of thought he could cause the swirlings to coalesce into microscopic worlds on which he could eventually create life.

He would awaken after long hours of sleep, and smile at the memory of his dreams, or frown in worry for his sanity, and return to the viewport after a hasty breakfast of synthetically flavored tablets and distilled water heated and flavored with synthetic coffee or tea flavoring.

The sight of the reality, the actual cloud of swirling particles, would dispel his fears. Whatever he might dream, the reality would always pull him back to normalcy.

So he let his dreams go where they willed, and each time he awoke he went to the viewport, allowing the actual cloud to act as an alarm clock that woke him to rationality again...

AND THEN came a dream more vivid than any other he had ever had. At first he was looking at the swirling cloud of dust as it had been when he left the viewport to stretch out and sleep. Then from

the depths of its center rose a dim blush of light, like the first glow of dawn before sunrise in the spring, when rainclouds lie low on the dark horizon.

Like that first blush of dawn it intensified until a fiery radiance focalized in one spot, its source still invisible. Then, so slowly that no motion could be sensed, there rose something with form. Solid.

It rose with infinite slowness. There came the slow realization that it would not be a circular orb. There came a period stretching endlessly, during which he wondered what it could be like, of studying its fragmentary outline and trying to build up a picture of the whole.

There came the period of inclination toward the belief that it would be a face, upturned in profile. The drawing away from that belief as even in sleep he realized that such a thing could only be created out of madness.

There came the recognition beyond all doubt that it *was* a face. The face of a woman. A girl whose beauty was beyond the ability of the imagination to conceive, with lips full and red, cheeks smooth and flushed, eyes large and covered by closed olive lids, forehead smooth and sloping into a wealth of dark hair.

Craig experienced a drawing away in horror conjured by the rationality of his mind in its belief that such a thing could not be, even in a dream. He experienced a drawing toward the slowly emerging visitor, the dizzy thrill of studying the smooth curve of neck, the white roundness of shoulders, the firm richness of form of breasts covered by widening ribbons of cloth that drew together at the waist under a colored sash.

Her red lips were slightly parted, smiling dreamily as though aware of his gaze and finding pleasure in it.

He drank of her beauty, sobbing, knowing it was but a dream, all the loneliness he had stored up without recognizing it bursting forth.

His emotions rose to a crescendo of happiness. Then, like a crash of lightning, came the realization that it was a dream and would be gone in a moment.

And he could no longer face living without her.

With that he awoke.

For the first time since the appearance of the cloud he didn't go to the viewport. Bitterness etched his face in deep lines. The pain of insufferable grief dwelt in his eyes.

He ate his breakfast slowly, prolonging the moment when he must go to the viewport and see the nebulous cloud as it really was—and shatter the dream.

The despair that his mind had destroyed was there again, dominant, unquenchable. The hopes upon which he had built his happiness were now tasteless.

Of what use to discover a new Earth peopled by strange and bizarre creatures—alone? Of what use was it even to live for another day, alone?

Disillusionment obsessed him. He saw the silly game he had been playing with himself. In his dreams he was God, creating a Cosmos from the dust, and in his waking life he was a foolish starved creature, alone in that Cosmos, unable to create anything at all. A mere human who had once been an assembly mechanic in a factory on Mars in the unreachable past.

His very thoughts grew intolerable. With a smothered curse he turned to look out the viewport he had avoided until now.

And she was there. As she had been in the dream. The same in every detail.

THE SAME? In the dream he had seen her with his thoughts. They were as adequate to portray her as words are to create the reality of a sunrise or the beauty of a flower.

The reality of her form, her beauty, was indescribable. Her head was still lifted in profile. As he watched, not breathing, her smile widened perceptibly. She was aware of him.

He sank back, his eyes leaving the viewport to stare into space at nothing. Had he created her from his own thoughts?

Had he indeed become a God? A Creator? Was she formed from the dust of the cloud? The flaked particles of paint that had colored his cosmicar?

Or was it madness? Had the madness of his dreams penetrated to his waking life?

"No!" he cried, sobbingly. "No!"

He turned to the viewport again, fiercely. He glared at the ineffable beauty embodied in that female form, trying to will it out of existence—to end the madness.

And she smiled more sweetly, her nostrils creasing from soft breathing, her breasts rising and falling slowly from the rhythm of breathing.

Breathing? That was impossible in the vacuum outside the car!

So it was madness. But was madness so bad? Wouldn't it be far better to *accept* the products of madness if they fulfilled his dreams? Wouldn't that be better than sanity and loneliness? For never again could he escape from loneliness if she were to vanish.

He blinked back his hot tears. An expression of peace settled on his features. He lifted his head and turned his gaze slowly toward the viewport. His lips broke into a trembling smile. A quotation came to his mind. His eyes focused on her upraised head gently.

"If this be madness," he said in a hoarse whisper, "so be it."

As if that were a signal that brought her to life, the girl's head began to turn, her eyes beginning to open as she turned, so that shortly she was looking directly at him, her eyes pools of bottomless blue, her lips still parted, revealing flawless white teeth in a smile that threatened to draw him by sheer magnetism across the space separating them.

Craig was laughing, crying, and trying to keep sight of her through the tears that distorted his vision. He leaned forward until his forehead pressed against the glass of the viewport. His trembling fingers pressed against the padded covering of the wall around the port.

He was searching for solidity of matter to cling to while his emotions and thoughts soared unrestrained and unrestrainable.

The red lips came into motion, forming words he couldn't hear. He watched their motion trying to guess at the words. He blinked back the tears angrily, wiping his eyes with his shirt sleeve.

He stared at her moving lips, the words they formed weren't quite intelligible yet. He looked into her eyes and moved his lips slowly in exaggerated formation of sounds.

"Speak more slowly," he said voicelessly.

She responded at once. Her lip motion became exaggerated and very slow so that he could interpret every syllable.

He watched eagerly, piecing the individual syllables together into words.

Then abruptly the expression of eagerness and concentration vanished.

The shock he experienced was greater than that he had experienced when he first looked out the viewport and found that his dream was there,

materialized into seemingly external form.

Her being there had violated the dictates of rationality. He had quickly met that by accepting irrationality. Now, just as dramatically, what she said violated the dictates of irrationality!

For the words she uttered could not possibly have originated in his own mind, however irrational. They couldn't have because they were no language or grouping of syllables existing in his mind.

THE FACT of her existence was harder to accept than had been the seeming fact of his insanity. An aura of unreality clung stubbornly to her. Ah-la-ah-low-ah was her name. Unless in some unplumbed and unsuspected depth of his mind a language had created itself full blown, to form a part of his delusion, she was real.

She had to be real. The way she formed his own name, Craig, with her lips, flavoring its sound, could not have been conjured into being by a fevered imagination.

She had to be real. And gradually he accepted it. She was real.

She was outside his ship. She was alive, yet she was a bundle of cosmic particles hurtling along at the speed of light the same as he.

She was real! He found himself giving way to emotion every once in a while. His joy would grow and then overcome him.

She sensed his happiness and smiled each time this happened. And she too seemed at times to be overcome by emotion.

And all the time she was emerging with almost infinite slowness from the heart of the dust cloud. Only, was it a cloud of powdered paint knocked off the shell of the cosmicar? It didn't seem so any more.

Craig re-examined it with new eyes. It seemed now to be not so much particles, of dust swirling about, but actually swirlings of space itself, catching rays of light and refracting them in such a way that the whole effect resembled a cloud.

The space-time field of the cosmicar would have its limits fixed by its mass and relationship to the greater universe. Did that limit blend without configuration into the general space-time continuum?

If it didn't, there might be an explanation for what had happened that would be consistent with general relativity.

Was the configuration of space-time about a material mass a function of that mass, or was the mass a dependent function of the configuration?

Was the adaptive limits of his small space a tuning element that touched other and unsuspected space-time continuums as a radio can tune in various radio stations?

These speculations went on at express-train speed in the back of his mind while he talked to her and watched her lips move without being able to understand what she said, nor her him.

They talked for the sheer pleasure it gave them to watch each other. They laughed and looked into each other's eyes, unafraid, and unashamed by what they saw there.

They were two souls alone in the universe. Destined to be alone and together forever.

Her long shapely legs emerged from the swirling cloud. She flushed with self-conscious pleasure at his unconcealed admiration for her figure.

Her feet emerged, clad in sandals with painted nails on small toes. Highly arched feet. Slim ankles blended into perfectly formed calves.

Craig's eyes lifted to her face again.

She was partly bent over, staring at her feet, alarm growing on her face.

She straightened again and tried to turn around. Instead, all she could do was flail her arms and contort her body.

Craig puzzled over this. What had happened?

Her lips went into quick motion, trying to convey her thoughts.

And whether it was his own logic piecing together what he saw, or a telepathic voice from her mind, he dimly saw what had taken place.

She had been standing on something solid in a world hidden beneath that strange cloud formation. Without realizing what was happening she had risen above the cloud until she no longer had any contact with that solidity!

And she couldn't get back!

CRAIG burst into action. Ahla-ahloa had been breathing air of her own world, obviously. Was that cut off now? Probably. But that was minor. She was now completely within his own frame of existence. She could come into the cosmicar.

Without stopping to think he pushed down on the door handle—and was almost dragged from his seat by the explosion of atmosphere into the outer vacuum.

Seconds later the door swung back and snapped shut again. And with blood pounding in his temples Craig threw the emergency switch that released a tank of replacement air into the car.

Gasping for breath he put his face to the viewport again. Ahla-ahloa was trying to see inside the cosmicar, a look of worried concern on her face.

When she saw that he was looking at her she shook her head insistently. Then she pointed at her breast and opened her mouth, breathing deeply.

Tapping her breast she nodded and smiled. The pantomime was clear. She did not lack for air. Was it because she could breathe in a vacuum?

The answer to that came slowly. The air she breathed was coming through the cloud as she herself had come. It was maintaining normal pressure.

But the implications of that sent a chill of dread through Craig. It meant that she was not in his space-time world at all, but one closely anchored to it. To it and to her own space-time of existence from which she had been drawn by an eddy in his own field.

He looked through the thick glass at her, yearning for her with every fibre of his being. She returned his look from the blue depths of her eyes with one that caused his heart to hurt with a pain that was ecstasy.

She formed words again with her lips. He thought he caught a meaning, but it slipped away before he could pin it down. He stilled his emotions and tried to become passively receptive. He knew that telepathy was a reality. If he could ever sense thought he must do so now.

She smiled weakly and nodded, then spoke again. Vaguely he began to get impressions that made sense.

She was verifying what he had built up of the setup of space-time systems and the cause of her being where she was. She explained further that she was from a universal space-time of infinite extent that was stationary relative to his own, or almost so, but that his space-time field could not straighten out by its own intrinsic properties.

Instead, it had grown tighter, forming a secondary system which had captured her. She had not at first realized the nature of it. Only when it was too late was she able to divine its nature.

And now each of them was confined

in a closed space-time world from which there was no escape nor stepping across from one to the other.

"So near and yet so far," Craig groaned, unaware of the triteness of his words.

She nodded sadly, her lips forming the thought in words of her own language.

She closed her eyes, apparently in thought. Craig waited. When she opened them she let her eyes roam, studying the outside of the cosmicar.

"Explain to me the operation of your cosmicar," she asked, the thought coming clear although the words formed by her lips were only beginning to grow familiar in *feel*.

"THE BASIC principle is simple,"

Craig said slowly, trying to keep his thoughts clear as he talked. "It was discovered six centuries ago that there was definitely a connection between cosmic rays and matter. A few isolated instances were obtained where a cosmic particle became an atom, with the release of a thing called a Q charge, called a meson in those days. The next step was the bringing together of a Q charge and an ordinary atom to produce a cosmic particle. This was finally accomplished. Meanwhile a system of collecting Q charges was devised. It became possible on a small scale to convert a small amount of matter into cosmic rays by releasing Q charges into it, but the resultant cosmic radiation was uncontrolled."

"The principle was used to make bombs the size of small eggs, one of which could devastate a hundred square miles. That was all it was good for until the N field was isolated in 2388 A. D."

He knew that much of this he was saying wasn't important and probably wasn't getting across, but it was

the way he had learned it in school.

"It was found that all atoms in an N field went in the same direction when converted into cosmic rays. The first ancestor of the cosmicar was a small missile aimed at the Moon of the Earth. The Q charge converted even the N field generator into cosmic rays.

"But that was not until it had been found that a sudden switching of the polarity of the N field would cause the cosmic particles to release their Q charge and become ordinary matter once more. The released Q charges could be drawn into a small condenser with relative safety.

"So that first ancestor of the cosmicar had the same trigger mechanism the modern cosmicar has. A plane of light twenty wave lengths deep was the signal to trigger the conversion mechanism. And it worked. The experimental model materialized a few miles above the Moon's surface the same second it left the Earth, its parts somewhat warped, but still intact. The principles embodied in that craft are in this cosmicar, only perfected to the point where they work reliably."

"Then why doesn't it work?" Ahla-ahloa asked, puzzled.

"I missed the Earth," Craig said, deciding not to tell her what was in back of that statement. "Now I'm stuck until my wave front meets some solid object and reflects back to trigger the converter."

"It is as I thought," Ahla-ahloa said. "I had to make sure you knew nothing that we don't know. You don't. But now that I'm sure, I know how we can get out of this fix we're in."

"How?" Craig asked eagerly.

"That must wait until I'm sure of what I say," Ahla-ahloa smiled. "You are impetuous. I must make sure of what I tell you. Now I'm going to close my eyes. Please don't watch me

for a time or it will prevent me from contacting those that I must talk with. Now that we can converse more easily by telepathy I can let you know when I'm ready."

She smiled pleadingly. Craig reluctantly nodded. He turned away from the viewport. His watch, to his surprise, told him it had been fourteen hours since he first looked through that thick circular pane of glass and saw Ahla-ahloa!

He sighed happily and sat back to eat some food tablets and do some thinking himself.

FOR THE first time in a long time Craig slept without dreaming of the "dust cloud" outside the viewport. That was understandable. It had abruptly lost its status as the most interesting thing in his universe. He knew now, vaguely, what its nature was. And it was just a background item. The supremely engrossing subject of his thoughts was a girl—the last thing he would have dreamed of dreaming of!

But in his dreams she was mixed up. Sometimes she was a goddess of huge proportions, occupying light-years of space, and light-years away. At other times she was just an ordinary girl, the kind he had always dreamed of meeting someday, without really expecting to be so lucky. Bernice had been a compromise with his dream-girl. A sort of practical answer to an ideal problem. Ahla-ahloa was the perfect answer down to the last decimal point.

He had one dream in which she was in a kitchen standing on a step ladder on tiptoe, reaching up for something he couldn't make out.

He woke up with a start when he realized this was symbolic for her entrance into his world. He lay with his eyes wide open, curled up on the cosmicar seat, wondering what the

world she had left was like.

Actually, from the standpoint of Euclidean space, it was right around him. Her living room, or wherever she had been when it had happened, was in the same Euclidean space he occupied.

She had implied as much. She had said if his world lines could be straightened out he would materialize in it. He tried to understand what was meant by that.

The clue really lay in the Q charge. At least it seemed to. If the Q charge could be drained off each atom of his world without altering the velocity of those atoms, they would be the ordinary matter of her world.

But what of Ahla-ahloa? Was she made of ordinary matter? Maybe the bridge between them was greater than even she guessed. The general theory of relativity carried hints of the obstacles that might be hidden there.

Ordinary matter traveling at the speed of light would have infinite mass. If she were to cross over into his space-time world she might instantly take on infinite mass, and not only crush him into nothing, but collapse the entire universe!

Or was her entire universe made up cosmic particles? Maybe that was it. Actually, what was ordinary matter? It was, in one way of looking at it, basic nuclear structures without the Q charge. If it were defined as basic nuclear units *with* the Q charge, then what he had always looked at as ordinary matter was all cosmic particles! So the only basic difference was the way you looked at it.

Now the fallacy of his original reasoning became clear. He could see the distant stars beyond her just as clearly as he had been able to before. She was already traveling at the speed of light relative to his old universe containing the Earth. So if she were or-

dinary matter she would have collapsed it already.

She was cosmic radiation the same as he. But what had she been before? She and her world had been there all the time, traveling along with him through the space-time universe of the Earth. Then she and her world had passed right through Mars without being aware of its existence. Cosmic radiation would have been dispersed and broken up by such a dense body as Mars.

So she had been neither cosmic particles nor ordinary matter. She had been a third state of the basic building blocks of reality. The link forming a bridge to that third state of matter had been in the eddies at the edge of his space-time system. In some way they had curved to form the bridge.

"That gives us the clue we need," a deep, resonant voice sounded.

It startled Craig. He awoke realizing he had been asleep. He opened his eyes with half formed impressions still there. Impressions of a large room, with many men sitting in row upon row, tiered like the seats in a theatre.

And there was an impression that Ahla-ahloa had been standing beside him on the platform. She had been standing next to him!

But it had been only a dream. He closed his eyes and tried to bring it back, without success. Giving it up, he opened his eyes. Had it really been a dream? What about his "dream" of the emergence of Ahla-ahloa from the cloud? It had turned out to be reality. Why not this?

He lifted up on his elbow and looked out the viewport. She was out there, her face lifted in profile as he had first seen her, her olive lids covering her wide eyes. A pang of sweet pain stabbed at his heart. He dropped back and shifted sleepily, closing his eyes....

THE MAN shook hands with him warmly, his lips flashing into a white-toothed smile.

"Come with me," he said. "I want to show you what we plan on doing."

He led the way, his broad shoulders swinging gracefully above a muscular back and slim hips encased in a brown uniform of strange cut.

Craig followed. He was a little confused in what seemed to him an absent-minded way. He knew the man's name was Jah-ahoano. But other than that he couldn't remember anything.

Oh yes! He had explained to Jah-ahoano and a lot of others his theory of what had happened and now Jah-ahoano was going to show him what they could do about things.

Then why did he dislike Jah-ahoano so intensely? He realized with a start that he hadn't known he disliked him until he consciously thought of it.

Jah-ahoano pushed open a heavy door and they passed into another room in which long rows of intricate machines hummed with subdued power.

"It's going to be a sort of pool or billiard shot, basically," Jah-ahoano said, leading the way to what appeared to be one end of a telescope. "This is a Z-field telescope," he explained. "It's similar to an electron cathod-ray tube in principle, but uses a current of Z charges instead of electrons. These are shot across the space inside the telescope and collide with enough of the quanta from your former space-time continuum to bring us rather complete images of the stars of that space-time. By shutting off the Z current we can also get the data on stars and other objects in our own space-time, and thus map the two in relation to each other."

He threw a switch and fragmentary images appeared on the image screen.

These fluctuated briefly, then became steady.

Craig studied them. At first they were just a field of luminous dots. These crept away from one another, growing larger. It was the same kind of motion as was produced by the electron telescope in the cosmicar when the magnetic lens was varied.

Finally a sun with five planets near it was centered on the image screen.

"This will be your eventual destination," Jah-ahoano said. "The third planet in that system. You won't hit it going as you are now. But look."

He pulled the switch and pushed another.

In the image screen appeared a fiery sun of huge size, off to the right.

"What we must do," Jah-ahoano said, "is infiltrate in some way a Z charge into your space-time field so that the gravity of that sun will alter your path enough for you to strike that planet I showed you."

"I understand that," Craig said. "I'll try to think of some clue to how it can be done. Are you going to have enough money left payday to pay me back that thirty you borrowed?"

Jah-ahoano looked at him, startled.

The next instant Craig opened his eyes. He had been asleep. Or had he? What had awakened him?

He shifted his position, his muscles tingling queerly.

"Oooh," he groaned wearily.

He sat up and looked at his watch, winding it. He had been asleep ten hours. No wonder he tingled. That was too much sleep.

Massaging his scalp with his fingers, he yawned widely and glanced out the window. Ahla-ahloa was there, in exactly the same position she had been when he went to sleep.

He turned his eyes away hastily, remembering her admonition not to watch her. He yawned again, fumbling

for the dashboard cold-water valve. He was thirsty.

HE FELT depressed, irritable. He was annoyed at himself and everything around him. The walls of his prison pressed in on him.

The series of dreams he had had were obviously nothing but dreams. Or were they? The possibility that they might not be annoyed him. But they had to be. His asking Jah-ahoano if he was going to pay back that thirty dollars was obviously dream stuff. It was Jack Spence who had borrowed thirty dollars.

And that stuff about a Z charge! He knew that was from his own mind. He had read a theory once about the possibility of Z particles. He couldn't recall what the theory had been about, but he definitely remembered reading it.

Suddenly his attention fixed on the electron telescope. The telescope in his dream came back vividly. Jah-ahoano had said it worked by the collision of Z charged particles with quanta, or something like that.

The electron telescope worked on a principle by which all types of radiation set up similar electron flows, so that with only one type of energy to deal with there could be unlimited magnification without distortion due to refraction. That's all it amounted to. But it wasn't supposed to be able to work while the cosmicar was going at light speed.

He snapped it on. Maybe it would work. No one had ever been in flight long enough to really find out, since you could go across the solar system in ten minutes.

Except for an occasional bright dot appearing on the screen nothing appeared. The bright dots were due to static. He watched for several minutes, playing with the magnification knob. There was nothing.

Viciously he shut off the telescope. There was nothing, absolutely nothing. Nothing but dreams and the most beautiful girl in all Creation outside the viewport, dangled like a piece of bait in a trap set by the gods.

She had originated as a dream and was reality. He turned and stared at her, ignoring her request not to do so that she had made.

Was she real? Either she was, or he was definitely insane. That's what it reduced to. And if he never got any closer to her than seeing distance he would go insane in any case, so it really made no difference.

Money is something insane. A piece of paper costing maybe ten cents to produce being able to buy something of real value. But people take it as a basic part of life.

It made no difference whether Ahla-ahloa was delusion or reality. She was there. And he couldn't reach her. He couldn't even get nearer to her because cosmicars didn't carry the unnecessary bulk of a spacesuit. They were never in space long enough for one to be needed.

Suddenly Craig's eyes narrowed. Out of nowhere a thought had popped into his mind. He turned quickly to the instrument panel. There was a pressure gauge up in the left hand corner of the panel. It was there to tell atmospheric pressure when you were flying in the stratosphere.

Its pointer should be at zero. Instead, it pointed to the numeral two. There was two pounds pressure outside the ship! The air he had released when he had opened the door had not escaped from his space-time closed field!

He sucked on his lip while he did some mental arithmetic. If he used all the air in the reserve tanks he could bring that pressure up to nearly ten pounds. Not enough for comfort, but enough so that he could breathe. If

it was too uncomfortable he could always close the door and start the air pump, drawing enough back into the ship for normal pressure.

What good would it do to release all the air outside the ship? None. Except that it might make it possible for him to get within a few feet of Ahla-ahloa. And if he died for it the next moment he would consider it worth doing.

He considered ways of doing it. The other time he had opened the door. The air in the cosmicar had rushed out at once. The door had swung violently open under that blast, then swung closed again. He had reached up and opened the tank valve, filling the car with air again. That valve shut off automatically when pressure reached fifteen pounds, but it had to be opened manually. That was to prevent all the air in the tanks from shooting out if a hole or leak developed in the shell.

The best thing to do would be to repeat what he had done before. Then he could check the pressure gauge and make sure that pressure outside had actually built up. If something happened so it didn't, he'd have enough left to live.

He carried out his plan. The gauge showed that pressure had increased to a little under four pounds outside the car. He repeated the performance. Pressure outside increased to five and three quarter pounds, but it was harder to breathe now. Something was wrong.

He breathed deeply and rapidly until he felt better. Then, his lips compressed in grim determination, he opened the door and leaned on the air valve.

He watched as the pressure gauge needle crept up to the eight mark and stayed there. He was gulping in air through his mouth, barely able to keep up with the demands of his body for oxygen.

But he was on fire with excitement. Pressure hadn't built up to the point he had expected, but he would be able to stand it!

HE STOOD in the open door, viewing Ahla-ahloa across the space that separated them. It seemed he could shove away from the car and drift over to her without anything to stop him.

To take her in his arms. To hold her, feel the vibrant aliveness of her against him. To touch her lips with his, to look into her eyes a few inches away from his own. To feel her breath against his cheek. To hear her voice.

His lungs bellowed in and out as he let go and shoved. He reached toward her, calling her name.

And she receded from him, swifter and swifter, until she seemed hundreds of yards distant.

Taking in lungful of the rarified air in sobbing gasps he twisted his head to look back at the cosmicar. It was ten feet away.

He turned to Ahla-ahloa. She was a thousand yards away. But how could that be?

He stretched out an arm toward her in impulsive pleading. His arm elongated until his hand seemed far away.

So that was it! Distortion! The space-time lines curved!

"Then she hasn't receded, but only seemed to!" Craig sobbed aloud in relief.

He pawed at the air, trying to swim through it in a dog-paddle stroke.

Ahla-ahloa receded a little more. But now he knew that was a good sign. He had approached a little nearer to her.

He swam more violently. He swam until he was exhausted. And she receded until she was almost lost in the distance.

He rested, his lungs aching, his mouth open as he gulped in air. And as he rested the realization came to

him that he could never reach her. To go nearer to her meant to have her seem to go farther away. Only at the ship could she appear to be close.

The two space-time fields were connected by world lines that curved close together where they joined. The light that carried the image of her came together. If he could penetrate that last inch she would seem microscopically small.

He turned back toward the car, sobbing in disappointment. Swimming dog-paddle he made it back to the doorway and entered.

Standing there, his blood pounding in his ears, his lungs working to full capacity, he looked at Ahla-ahloa, deep longing and indescribable suffering reflected in his bloodshot eyes.

Then, shoulders sagging in defeat, he entered and closed the door. Sinking down onto the seat he started the air pump. As pressure inside the ship built up, his breathing became less violent. The torture in his lungs lessened. The pounding of blood in his ears died down and vanished.

A shudder shook his body. He cupped his head in his arms against the instrument panel and sobbed unrestrainedly.

AND IN THE depths of his misery a voice spoke. Clearly, in liquid notes.

"Craig."

"Huh?" he said, startled, jerking upright.

He looked about him, but there was no one. He leaned forward and looked through the viewport. Ahla-ahloa was looking at him, her olive lids slitted open to reveal blue, lurking depths that accused him tenderly.

Her lips moved. In Craig's mind formed the words, "You have been impetuous again. You should have been patient."

"Patient?" he echoed half angrily.

"Don't you understand? I love you. I want you."

Her olive lids opened. He trembled under the caress of her eyes, but continued to hold his gaze on her face.

"That can't ever be possible," she said. "Jah-ahoano is going to try to make it possible for you to convert back to matter."

Jah-ahoano! He had seen her lips form the word! Then it wasn't a dream.

"But when that happens," Ahla-ahloa was saying, "our two joined fields will separate. The lines of mine will hook onto my own universe once more, since they were of that universe before, and merely warped to connect with you through the force of the eddy at the edge of your field."

But as she said this she seemed to slip another thought against her will. What was more likely to happen was that instead of straightening out, the world lines of her space would curve to join on themselves, and she would be forever in a completely enclosed space-time field that could never be contacted.

"So," Craig said gently. "You'll risk that to free me."

"Risk?" she asked. "What other course is there?"

"I don't know," Craig said. "But the very fact that you could get into that eddy tied to my space indicates that there must be some other way."

"You forget something," Ahla-ahloa said. "The moment I entered this eddy completely I became the mass that determines its world lines. When our two small universes separate finally, mine will close in on itself forever. Its world lines will be infinite within themselves. Nothing, no force whatever, will be able to enter or leave it. When I die the substance of my body will evolve into worlds and suns throughout all future time."

"Then why hasn't it broken loose

already?" Craig demanded. "Why does that thin connecting space exist between our two space-time systems?"

"That I don't know," Ahla-ahloa said. "Nor does anyone I have talked to."

"I think I know the reason," Craig said earnestly. "What is the one thing that seems independent of space-time lines? It's thought. Telepathy, perhaps. It travels instantly. It has no trouble going from my space-time contours directly into the universe you left."

"That is well known," Ahla-ahloa admitted. "But therefore it couldn't be the force that holds our two spaces together."

"It isn't, by itself," Craig said. "But something more powerful even than thought is doing it."

He looked at her, a smile on his lips.

"You mean—?" she asked. "But of course that's what you mean. Love. But love is a physical attraction—"

"It's both a physical and mental attraction," Craig corrected her. "I don't have any idea of the inter-relationship of thought and other types of energy. I know what is obvious: that the human mind is a physical structure, yet able to generate and also be affected by a type of energy that transcends all barriers of space-time." He looked at her, hesitating. "I'd wager my soul, he added softly, "that if you turned away from that love that holds us together, our continuums would separate at once. And by the same token that love can draw us together into one continuum if you let it; and you can come over and enter this cosmicar with me so that when it meets matter of my own space-time we will convert into ordinary matter together."

Even as he spoke he knew he was both saying the right thing and making a terrible mistake. A tendril of thought in the back of his mind told him that Jah-ahoano was aware of

what he said, and that he wanted Ahla-ahloa for himself. He might be able to use what he had learned to break that connecting tube of space. But at the same time it gave both himself and Ahla-ahloa the knowledge and confidence they needed to hold on.

"SO NOW THE issues are clear,"

Craig said to himself with a bitter laugh. "I understand why I asked Jah-ahoano when he would pay back the thirty he owed me. It was an association of a subconscious recognition that he was a threat with that other threat, Jack Spence. And like Jack Spence he's working to send me on my way so I can never come back." He smiled wryly. "I can't say that I blame him, either. But how can I stop him?"

That was the problem. If Jah-ahoano succeeded in what he was planning, the very least that would happen would be that he would wind up transformed back into ordinary matter on a planet circling a sun that was still a few trillion miles away, while Ahla-ahloa would continue on at the speed of light, imprisoned forever in a small space-time sphere. Or her world lines would reconnect with her own universe and Jah-ahoano would have her to himself.

Not even the power of thought would reach out and hold them together once that plane of light ahead of him found some to reflect back from and trigger the mechanism that reversed the N field and kicked the Q charge loose from each atom in the cosmicar.

He hadn't wasted time mourning over the loss of Bernice. He had subconsciously known all the time that his love for her was superficial. Created by the necessities of custom and social pressure.

But Ahla-ahloa—he couldn't give her up. Every detail of form that was her,

the blue depths of her eyes, the intimacy of her telepathic attunement with him, were now parts of him. Take them away and there would be nothing.

She felt the same way about him. She must. Such a feeling couldn't possibly exist without its counterpart.

Jah-ahoano had said what he planned to do was infiltrate Z charges into the space-time field of the cosmic car so that it would respond to the gravity pull of a giant sun. But that was queer. Weren't they still on the planet Ahla-ahloa had been on when she was trapped by the eddy?

Of course they weren't! They were hurtling along in a straight line path, while the planet she had lived on was going ahead or receding on its course around that sun! They were even now in the interplanetary spaces of her solar system.

The whole thing was becoming clearer. Without the Z charge they would be totally unaffected by the gravitational field of that sun, and continue on in a straight line. Then they would miss that sun and planets that he had seen through the Z telescope.

What then? He and Ahla-ahloa would be lost to all worlds. They would leave her home planet so far behind that Jah-ahoano wouldn't be able to contact her.

Craig placed his hands on either side of his head and tried to reason things out. He could see no answer. None except that proposed by Jah-ahoano. There must be another!

He turned fiercely to the viewport.

"Ahla-ahloa," he said. "Is there no other way? Do you love me enough so that you would choose to risk death or being imprisoned forever in a tight space-time in the hopes that we could be together?"

She looked at him, unafraid. There was no need for her to answer. Craig saw his answer in her expression. But she gave her answer anyway.

"Yes, Craig," she said. "I want to risk that if I can be with you. I love you."

"Not Jah-ahoano?" he demanded.

"I've never loved him," she said evenly. "He loves me, yes. But I love you."

"That's all I wanted to know," Craig said. "Now I promise you this. There is a way out of all this we're in. I don't know what it is, but I'm going to find it. You must help me all you can."

"I'll do whatever you think best," Ahla-ahloa said.

"Tell me," Craig said. "How was I able to stand before that audience of scientists in your world? How was I able to walk beside Jah-ahoano and look through that Z telescope?"

"You were using the body and eyes and brain of—" She frowned in thought. "A man corresponding to what you would call a spirit medium on the Earth. He isn't that, really. He's more like the other half of a two-way radio. He has the natural gift of shorting his body controls directly to his telepathic senses so that, in effect, you get his every sensation, and control his body like you were in it."

"I understand," Craig said. "I did that once. I can do it again. I've got to."

"It should be easier the second time," Ahla-ahloa said. "Concentrate on it while you go to sleep, and it should happen."

CRAIG opened his eyes. He was sitting in a chair. There was no one else in the room.

He glanced down at his knees. They were encased in a soft brown material, neatly pressed. He held his hands in front of him and inspected them. They were not his hands as he knew them. They were smoother, narrower, with longer fingers. The hands of an artist:

Something deep within him whis-

pered that he was a musician. An image of the instrument he played rose into consciousness. It was very much like a violin, but with five strings.

He stood up and walked across the room to a door that he knew led to a bedroom. There was a dresser with a mirror. It was so little different than any he had seen on Earth that it could have been used there without exciting comment.

He went to the mirror and stood in front of it, examining himself. A feeling of satisfaction grew within him at what he saw reflected.

A high forehead with wide set eyes, gray with blue, alive with an inner fire. A wide mouth with firm, well-shaped lips. A nose neither too narrow nor too wide. A cleft chin and strong jaw-line tinged with sensitiveness. Black hair combed back, hugging his scalp. Shoulders that were just right.

He looked in the mirror at his right hand and lifted it quickly, marveling at the perfect control he possessed over this body.

He spoke aloud, and though he knew the words were in a tongue he didn't know, an automatic part of the mind he controlled took care of translating his thoughts into that tongue and interpreting it for him.

He pinched the skin of his wrist until it hurt, and the suffering was his own. Vivid.

If he had not known who he was he would have never believed he hadn't always occupied this body. He seemed to be in. It was uncanny!

He recalled the reason he was here. He wondered how he would find his way to Jah-ahoano. And immediately he knew as surely as though he had always known.

He wondered what his name was, and immediately he knew that it was Meeral.

It was a strange feeling to learn

things for the first time and at the same time feel that he had always known them. That came from thinking with a brain that wasn't his own, while at the same time thinking with his own brain.

He wondered if the same thing happened in spirit control through mediums back on Earth. If the so-called spirits were not somewhere else than "in" the medium's body, even though they seemed to believe they were. But he had never been interested in such things. All he knew about them, actually, was what his spinster aunt had said in her perpetual talks about such things. They had been her main interest in life.

A bell rang somewhere. Immediately Craig knew it was the phone and that it was on a desk in the room he had just left. He hurried to answer it.

It was Jah-ahoano. He recognized his voice.

"Hello? Meeral?" Jah-ahoano asked.

Craig hesitated a fraction of a second, then merely said, "Yes."

"Come on over," Jah-ahoano said.

"It's about time for Craig Terry to be asleep again. If he is we can go through with my plan for infiltrating Z charge into his space-time field."

"I'll be right over," Craig said, keeping the excitement out of his voice.

The excitement was caused by a flood of thought that rose from Meeral's brain. This thing that had happened had not been with Meeral's consent. He had been caught by surprise. He had been a victim of his own habit patterns when Craig contacted him. Automatically he had become passive, and now he could do nothing about it until Craig relinquished his telepathic hold.

Confidence surged through him. He was in the driver's seat now. As Meeral he could work things his own way.

He dropped the receiver back on its hook slowly, smiling.

THE CITY was strange, but no more so than a city in some foreign country on Earth. Craig marvelled at the similarity. It was understandable, though. Science had long ago proved that with the finite variety of form, any alien civilization must resemble Earth civilization in most respects. That was not as remarkable as was the fact that the intelligent life form here was human. But even that science had shown to be almost inevitable. Life forms arose from gene patterns which were chemical structures, and although gene structures were capable of a large number of variations, these narrowed down when some specific result was aimed at. The probability of an alien intelligent life form being human was much greater than early science would have thought possible.

His car, parked by the curb, was fairly new, but a style that was centuries old on Earth. He climbed behind the wheel and unlocked the ignition.

Traffic laws were exactly the same as on Earth, even to driving on the right hand side of the road!

Craig guided his car expertly through traffic, knowing exactly what he was doing and where he was going. He pulled up after fifteen minutes in front of a large building. This was the building he had been in before. The one housing the Z telescope.

Jah-ahoano met him at the door.

"Let's hurry," he said. "It's going to take several hours to do the job, and it must be done before he wakes. He knows now that it will separate him from Ahla-ahloa, and he'll fight it."

"It seems a shame it has to be done," Craig said, carrying out his deception of being Meeral. "There should be some other way of freeing Ahla-ahloa from that eddy in space-time."

"There is another way," Jah-ahoano said impatiently, "but it would merge

her space with his rather than freeing her of it, and she'd be lost forever to her own space-time universe."

Craig concealed his excitement beneath a yawn.

"But if she loves him," he said with what he hoped sounded like complete indifference, "wouldn't that be all right? I mean, what does *she* want to do?"

Jah-ahoano grinned mirthlessly.

"Look, you ninny," he said tolerantly. "It so happens I love the gal. Do you think I'm going to give her up to some guy from another universe altogether?"

"But what is this other way?" Craig asked innocently.

"Come with me and I'll show you," Jah-ahoano said with impatient reluctance. "It will take a few minutes, but I suppose I have to satisfy your curiosity or you won't get in the mood to cooperate with me."

He turned abruptly. Craig followed him, his heart pounding against his ribs.

They passed through several doors. Then they were walking where he had first been aware of walking with him the other time. They were going to the laboratory containing the Z telescope.

"This is going to take tremendous magnification," Jah-ahoano said, manipulating the controls of the telescope.

Craig watched curiously. A bright star appeared on the image screen. It grew until it filled the screen. Then gradually it separated into many small bright dots.

"Lucky for me that galaxy was on the other side of it," Jah-ahoano muttered. "Otherwise I'd never have discovered it." He glanced at Craig, or Meeral as he thought him to be. "What I'm going to show you," he explained, "is directly in their line of flight as they are headed now. If I don't succeed in infiltrating a Z charge into

Craig's space-time region they'll reach it in about two weeks of our time, and one week of their time."

Craig watched the viewscreen with renewed interest. The galaxy enlarged until the telescope brought only a few dozen stars. They were shimmering and wavering rapidly.

"How much magnification is it getting?" he asked. "It must be terrific to make them dance like that."

"That isn't caused by magnification," Jah-ahoano said without looking from the screen. "That's caused by the thing I discovered. As soon as I get it just right I'll show you something else about it."

"What is it?" Craig persisted.

Jah-ahoano straightened up and fixed him with a fierce scowl.

"It's a vortex," he said. "And in case you've never heard of a vortex it's something different than anything else in the universe. In a way it's a little like the eddy in Craig's space-time that trapped Ahla-ahloa. Only it's an eddy in the cosmos itself."

"BUT HOW can that be?" Craig asked.

He realized the moment he spoke he had made a mistake. Jah-ahoano looked at him with sharp suspicion.

"What I mean," Craig said, thinking fast, "is, what makes you think they're the same?"

The suspicion faded in Jah-ahoano's eyes.

"The behavior of the two are identical," he said. Then he smiled. "I keep forgetting you're a musician and don't know much about science. Watch what happens when I turn on the Z current."

He pulled a lever.

"That pulls a thick plate over the telescope," he said. "It cuts off all radiation from our universe. Now when I turn on the Z-current it will affect only energy in the world lines of the

universe Craig comes from. In the straight line universe of space that holds both universes co-spatially, the radiation the Z charge affects is going at twice light speed relative to us. We used to think that was impossible, but now we know that such a speed merely throws whatever it is traveling right out of our space-time and into one its speed is consistent with."

As he talked he turned on the Z current. The vortex on the viewscreen altered only a little. It appeared to be a negative from which the previous view of the vortex was a print. Its dark and light areas were reversed.

"See?" Jah-ahoano said. "It's still there, proving that it exists in both the space-time universes. Craig's and ours."

"And if Craig and Ahla-ahloa are let go as they are and they run into it?" Craig asked.

"Heaven knows what will happen," Jah-ahoano said. "One thing I know. They'll never escape from it. It's light years across, but even at this distance you can see how it swirls."

Craig watched for several minutes. There was a perceptible movement to it. The movements would have to be near light speed to be perceptible at this distance. He suggested this to Jah-ahoano.

"That's how it exists," he explained. "At its outer perimeter it's travelling at light speed. One rim keeps pace with our universe, the opposite one with the other universe. Whatever got it started originally, it established connections between the two universes. And once started, there was nothing to stop it. It's a huge devouring maw, swallowing whole suns without so much as a burp."

"Then it would destroy Ahla-ahloa and Craig?" Craig asked.

"I have no idea what it would do to them," Jah-ahoano said. "Mathematics goes haywire when it tries to

picture what goes on in the vortex. It comes up with infinite space-time continuums that are at the same time infinitely bigger than our universe and infinitely smaller than an atom. I do know this. The only possibility of Craig and Ahla-ahloa ever getting together in the flesh is for them to enter the vortex, because there's no other way. That's the only possible way for the simple reason that no one knows what does happen in the vortex. No one ever can without entering it."

"I see," Craig said, somewhat uncertainly. "Now back to this business. Just how can you infiltrate Z charge into Craig's space?"

"I told you that before," Jah-ahoano said, "but I guess your memory of science is about as long as the hair on your cheeks." He laughed at his joke.

"I remember," Craig said truthfully, the details of it flooding into his consciousness from Meeral's memory. "But tell me again. It's rather vague to me yet."

"Telepathy," Jah-ahoano explained, "is accomplished by the human mind becoming one plate of a condenser in which Z particles are the units of charge rather than electrons. When contact is established, any fluctuation in the charge in one mind is reflected in the other. They become like two plates of a condenser. The only way they can is for the circuit to be made between them in some way so that a charge leaving one mind flows over the circuit to the other. That circuit is made in subspace, or the straight line space common to all space-time universes that may exist in it.

"So when you are in telepathic contact with Craig that circuit in subspace is established. Then all I have to do is connect a Z tank to you, and it drains into Craig. It won't harm either of you. You won't even feel it, except for a little confusion of

thought, but that is all."

Craig nodded. He was getting the whole picture. The grand overall scheme of the omniverse. A twinge of regret shot through him. Someday Earth science would learn all this, but how much more quickly if he could understand the mathematics and the principles involved in the proof of it, and return to Earth and tell them!

But there was no turning back. He could turn back by letting Jah-ahoano do what he wanted to—at the cost of losing Ahla-ahloa. That would be too great a price to pay even if he could master the theory, and he couldn't.

"Huh?" he said.

"I said are you ready?" Jah-ahoano said impatiently. "What's the matter? Aren't you getting paid enough for this?"

It was an opening. Craig seized on it.

"Frankly," he said, grinning mirthlessly, "no. Not a tenth enough."

Jah-ahoano blinked at him stupidly in surprise. Suddenly a fierce light appeared in his eyes.

"All right, Craig," he said. "So it's you I've been talking to. Well," he shrugged indifferently, "it makes no difference one way or another. The contact is already there. I'll use it."

HE REACHED out swiftly and gripped Craig's shoulders. Craig struggled, but was helpless in the grasp of the stronger Jah-ahoano.

"Over there in that chair, Craig," he said, pushing.

Craig tried to will the contact with Meeral. His panic should have broken it. His willing it broken should have done so in any case. He remained to all intents and purposes Craig in Meeral's body.

Dimly he realized why. The thing that he was terrified of held him. The strong emotion of terror kept him from turning away from what terrified him.

It was the same perverted instinct that draws a person toward the brink of a high place.

Jah-ahoano's grinning face was inches from his own. He struggled hopelessly. Then, his Earth training and reflexes took over.

He sagged, drooping his head, closing his eyes to mere slits. Jah-ahoano fell for it and relaxed his grip.

Instantly Craig straightened and shot a fist into Jah-ahoano's face, feeling a knuckle crack under the unaccustomed force.

He stepped back out of reach, watching Jah-ahoano's nose. It was bent at a crazy angle, broken. Jah-ahoano shook his head dazedly, unable to grasp what had happened so quickly.

Craig took advantage of his moment of surprise and darted in again, landing a blow that shot searing pain from his broken knuckle up his arm, causing him to go weak.

He clamped his teeth together and used his left fist, landing a vicious jab on Jah-ahoano's right eye.

He stepped back, shaking his right hand tenderly, wary eyes on Jah-ahoano.

Muffled curses came from Jah-ahoano's lips. He lowered his head and rushed forward, arms flailing.

Craig stepped aside at the last instant and let him rush past.

From far away seemed to come a cheer. It was Ahla-ahloa, a mental finger keeping track of what was happening.

Craig grinned, feeling cocky.

Jah-ahoano rushed him again. Craig stepped aside and put out a foot, tripping the larger man. But he was too cocky. He hadn't stepped clear. Jah-ahoano's fist caught him on the back of the head and sent him sprawling.

He tried to turn as he fell, but Jah-ahoano had caught himself quickly and seen his advantage. He rolled and

caught Craig in his arms, pinning Craig's arms to his sides.

His grinning face was inches away, blood streaming from his broken nose. "Got you!" he said.

He struggled clumsily to his feet with his burden, never once loosening his encircling grip. He lifted Craig's feet from the floor and carried him toward the chair connected to the Z charged tanks.

Craig struggled to break free. Jah-ahoano's grip couldn't be broken. And the ruse of going limp wouldn't work a second time.

He felt despair flooding over him. Then inspiration came to his aid. He used his head as a battering ram, pounding on Jah-ahoano's broken nose.

He heard Jah-ahoano scream in pain. The grip that held him fell away. He landed off balance and danced backward to keep his feet.

He looked up in time to see Jah-ahoano, gone berserk with rage and pain, his original plan forsaken, rushing at him with an upraised chair.

He jumped aside as the chair crashed down on a table of delicate scientific instruments behind him. His lips were grim lines.

As Jah-ahoano tried to straighten up from his rushing attack Craig picked up a heavy case containing some instrument and brought it down on the back of his head. It crunched sickeningly.

Jah-ahoano sank slowly to the floor, not a sound escaping from his lips.

Sick at the memory of that crunching sound, Craig approached the limp form timidly and bent down. His fingers searched a wrist for a pulse. There was none.

"DEAD!" HE said hoarsely. And it was both he and Meeral who commanded the lips to utter the word.

Numbly he felt himself straightening up and shrinking away from the

dead Jah-ahoano. And in the back of his mind something seemed to separate, though yet remaining a part of him. It was Meeral.

Meeral was a part of him. A part of his mind. He tried to escape, to return to his body in consciousness.

"You did this," Meeral's thought accused him. "You want to escape and leave me to be blamed for this, and I can have no defense. What would I tell a court of law?"

"I'm sorry, Meeral," Craig spoke in his thoughts.

"Sorry!" Meeral screamed at him in his thoughts, while the lips of his slack face hung open, glazed eyes still staring at the dead Jah-ahoano. "And why did you do it? Because you want Ahla-ahloa. That's why. You couldn't be content to accept the fate that was already yours before you ever saw her. No. You'd rather kill Jah-ahoano and let me hang for it so you can have her."

"That's not true," Craig pleaded. "You know it's not true. It wasn't my fault he died."

"It was," Meeral said. "You think you can break our contact. Hah! It won't be broken until we both want it broken. I'm going to do what Jah-ahoano intended doing before I let you break it. I'm going to shoot the Z charge into your cosmicar so that it will be pulled off its course by the sun. Only I'm going to do it differently than Jah-ahoano would have done. I'm going to wait until it won't pull you off enough to hit that planet. I'm going to make you miss it, so that you and Ahla-ahloa will travel on through space forever—or at least a few hundred years. Long before then she'll die, and you'll have her bloated corpse to worship like you worship her body now."

He walked over to the chair. Craig struggled to prevent him from using his own legs. All he succeeded in do-

ing was making him stumble. He caught himself before he fell.

When he sat down Craig seized control for a brief moment and brought him to his feet.

Meeral tried to regain control, wrested it from Craig's mental grasp, and lost it again. Craig forced Meeral's body to run toward the door. Meeral seized enough control to trip him and send him sliding.

It was weird. Two minds in one brain, fighting for control of the body commanded by neural impulses from that brain. Craig trying either to break contact with that brain completely, or to dominate it completely. Meeral holding the mental contact, the telepathic bridge, so that when he sat in the chair and took the Z charge it would jump across to Craig's body in the cosmicar. Meeral trying to gain control of his own body so that he could make it sit in that chair and throw the switch.

To an outsider who didn't know of the inner conflict it would have seemed that an insane man was running berserk. Meeral's body ran this way and that, tripping clumsily and falling, to struggle up and run again.

A handsome sensitive artist's face, jaw slack, sobbing noises coming from drooling lips flecked with foam. Glazed eyes that stared at nothing, one finger of the right hand twisted at a cruel angle, clothes torn and awry.

Despair grew in Craig at Meeral's insane determination to wreak vengeance on him and Ahla-ahloa for what had happened, even though what had happened could not have been avoided by Craig. The despair was all the more acute for knowing that if he thought of any plan to triumph, Meeral would know the plan at the same instant and make plans to prevent it.

Then suddenly a plan came, and he knew it was the only plan that could have any hopes of succeeding.

If he could run head on against a wall and knock Meeral's body out, he would be free of it!

Instinctively he drew back from the idea. It would be like dying. It might even cause Meeral's death. Was it worth it? Jah-ahoano's death had been unintentional. It had been just a desperate attempt to stop a crazy man from doing something.

Meeral's fight, though against him and for pure vengeance, was nothing to kill him over. Enough harm had come to Meeral already. He would be held to account for a killing he hadn't done.

Craig tried to picture himself living with Meeral's death on his conscience. That would destroy the very happiness he was fighting to gain. He couldn't. Suddenly he knew that he had lost. He had defeated himself.

"All right, Meeral," he said in his thoughts. "You win. Do what you will. I won't try to stop you any more."

MEEERAL seized the control of his own body with a surge of triumph. He looked around the huge laboratory, getting his bearings once more.

He spied the chair connected with the Z charge tank, shook his shoulders and his head to clear his vision, and strode toward it.

Craig watched the chair that symbolized the end of all his dreams, an infinite sadness growing in him. He made no attempt to stop Meeral.

Meeral sat down in the chair. He reached for the switch that would complete his revenge. It was too far away. He got up and started exploring at nearby benches for something that could be used to throw the switch while sitting in the chair.

It was Craig who pointed out that a certain glass tube would do.

Meeral hesitated, then picked it up and returned to the chair. He sat down and reached out with the glass tube in

his hand toward the switch. One quick push and it would be done.

The glass tube touched the switch, then drew away. Meeral hesitated.

Amazed, Craig tried to read what he was thinking. But for the first time he couldn't. He dropped his arm, and as it dropped he realized it had done so at his own thought!

"What's the matter, Meeral?" he asked, remaining seated though he knew instinctively that he could rise.

A mirthless laugh came from the part of his mind that was Meeral.

"If you had fought it I could have," Meeral said bitterly. "But now I can't. Do you understand? You surrendered because you knew you couldn't live with your conscience if you had my blood on your hands. Do you think I could live with mine, knowing that I had deliberately destroyed that which you hold more dear than life itself? When I know in my heart that it wasn't really your fault that Jah-ahoano was killed by that blow?"

Craig said nothing. There was no need to. His very thoughts were conveyed to Meeral the moment he thought them.

"So you win," Meeral said bitterly.

"I?" Craig said. "I?"

He stared at the slender glass rod in his hand, its tip touching the floor lightly.

"I?" he whispered. "No, not I. I've been selfish. I've thought only of my own happiness. I couldn't bear the thought of continuing on through space at the speed of light alone. I wanted to drag Ahla-ahloa along with me. I love her, but maybe my fear of being alone was as great as my love for her. What could I have offered her? Death. Or even worse, a life with only me on some alien world. An unknown fate sharing the vortex with me, where even mathematics and thought can't penetrate to find out what would happen.

"Jah-ahoano was right," he continued emotionlessly. "His plan would free Ahla-ahloa. I read in your mind that he intended following in a space-ship and rescuing her the moment her space-time configuration broke from mine and settled into her own universe. And that's what must be done. Could you do it, Meeral?"

"Yes," Meeral's thought rose into consciousness.

"Then Ahla-ahloa could come back with you and appear in court at your trial," Craig said. "Her evidence might sway the jury in your favor." Craig smiled. "If her evidence didn't," he added, "her knees surely would."

"Yes," the part of Craig's mind that was Meeral said, a little hysterical.

"Then you will do that?" Craig asked. "You will have to get away quickly before Jah-ahoano's body is discovered. If you're stopped they won't listen to you. Ahla-ahloa will emerge into the vacuum of space and die quickly."

"Yes," Meeral said.

"Then where are Jah-ahoano's figures?" Craig asked. "We've got to do this exactly as he figured it should be done."

"No figures are necessary," Meeral said. "The critical value is the Z charge, up until two hours from now. He had already completed his calculations according to the new equations the existence of the eddy field Ahla-ahloa is in dictated."

Craig raised the glass rod to the switch.

"Goodby, Meeral," he said softly. "I—I wish I could have remained with you."

He pushed the switch in with the glass rod without waiting for Meeral's answer.

HE OPENED his eyes and saw the familiar details of the cosmicar,

and closed them again. What a dream! Only it wasn't a dream. It had really happened.

But that was several hours ago. He vaguely remembered being aware of being back in his own body, and of falling immediately into a deep dreamless sleep.

Meeral would already be on his way now, out in space. He might already be tagging along, following with the aid of instruments that could detect at least the eddy field in which Ahla-ahloa was imprisoned.

To take her aboard when she was freed. To rush onward with her at the speed of light in that other universe while he faced an alien world alone.

In a way he had earned his fate. Back on Earth he had taken Bernice away from Jack, who loved her so much he had killed him, or what amounted to killing him, so that he could have her again. He had laughed at the thought that even though he was gone Bernice wouldn't have Jack on a bet. And that was his doing too. He had been a little worried that Jack might still have a hold on her, and had calmly set about breaking that beyond patching.

Even loaning Jack money had been a subtle way of building up his own ego at Jack's expense. Thirty dollars. Thirty pieces of silver. He felt like thirty cents now as he thought of his wish that Jack would kill himself in remorse, as Judas had done. If it were in his power to do so he would die thirty deaths by torture to bring Jack and Bernice together again.

And the whole stupid pattern had repeated itself in his actions with Jah-ahoano and Ahla-ahloa. To be sure, he loved Ahla-ahloa, and he had never really loved Bernice. But the end result was the same.

Jah-ahoano had been peacefully planning on devoting his life to making Ahla-ahloa happy. Not a dark cloud

was on the horizon. And then *he* had come along. To break that up and righteously assume that he had every right to do so, and convincing himself that Jah-ahoano was a dirty, stinking, under-handed heel from way back.

Now Jah-ahoano was dead. He had even contemplated bashing Meeral's head against the wall for a minute so that he could gain his own stupidly selfish ends.

He was appalled at himself.

"For the first time in my life I see myself as I really am!" he whispered aloud, his mouth half pressed into the seat upholstery.

He recalled Meeral's features as he had seen them in the mirror. Meeral would rescue Ahla-ahloa. Maybe they would fall in love. He was a mighty fine fellow. A musician, too. With a sensitive, kind soul. He could make Ahla-ahloa happy. He could bring a smile to those beautiful red lips, a sparkle of happiness to those slitted blue eyes.

That is, he could if he could get free of the murder charge that would be filed against him when the police discovered Jah-ahoano's body, and the fingerprints on the murder weapon. If he was convicted—well, that would just about complete everything. Hell couldn't be big enough to pay him for all he had done to innocent people while looking on himself as something wonderful.

But hell wasn't going to get him for a long time. First he was going to find a planet where he could help somebody or some creature. A whole race. He would have to live a long time and do a lot of good to make up for all he had done.

That would be his purpose in life now. Suicide was no good. Death was too good for him.

How Ahla-ahloa must loathe him, now that she had seen him in action.

Seen what he could really do under the guise of righteous indignation. Maybe that loathing she must feel for him had already severed the world lines connecting their two spaces. Maybe Meeral had already picked her up and they were right now on their way back to their home planet.

It had been love that had held him and Ahla-ahloa together. But love had to exist at two poles to be a magnet drawing those poles together.

If he could only find out if she survived and found happiness with Meeral...

He groaned deeply in utter misery.

"You sure hate yourself, don't you!"

The voice in his mind chilled him to the bone. It was the all too familiar voice of Meeral:

"Meeral!" he exploded. "But it can't be you! Or can it? Of course! You can still contact me telepathically. That hadn't occurred to me."

"No," Meeral's mental voice said. "I just woke up a few minutes ago and have been listening to you. You see, there's something Jah-ahoano *neglected* to tell me. The psyche is a pattern of Z charges. When that charge surged through me to your body I realized too late what was going to happen. You see, *I'm here.*"

"**I**'M AS MUCH a resident of your body as you are," Meeral said. "I've tried, and I can't even raise a whisper of a contact with my own body. I think it's dead."

"You think it's dead!" Craig echoed. His flesh crawled at the calm way Meeral had said it. But of course Meeral was suffering from shock. Anyone would to be rooted out of their body and planted in another, and realize it was permanent.

"You think you're a heel?" Meeral went on calmly, ignoring Craig's thoughts about him. "You're just an innocent baby compared to Jah-

ahoano. He was deliberately sacrificing me for his own ends. And he was doing it in cold blood. Just like that fellow, Jack, that you're so sorry for. He sent you off into space in a cold-blooded act to get rid of you. And don't think that Bernice, and Ahla-ahloa, didn't recognize that quality in those men. Maybe not consciously, but they did, just the same."

"Ahla-ahloa!" Craig said. "There won't be anyone to rescue her now when I hit that planet and reconvert into matter! You won't be there!"

"I know," Meeral said sadly. "There's nothing that can be done about it, either."

"Don't take it so calmly," Craig said.

"I'm not taking it calmly," Meeral said. "I feel just as bad about it as you do. Stop judging other people all the time. There's just nothing we can do. That's all."

"Maybe it's happened already," Craig whispered aloud. "When she saw me as I really am our two spaces must have broken apart, since all that held us together was our mutual love. And now she's dead. I've killed her."

Hot tears flowed from his eyes.

"Oh, stop it, Craig," Meeral said irritably. "Why don't you sit up and look? Maybe she's still there. Maybe she needs you to comfort her during her last moments, and you just lie here crying like a baby."

"Sit up?" Craig said. "Yes. Of course. I've got to comfort her."

He twisted his body out of its cramped position and tried to sit up. His arms tingled. They were asleep. He lay on his back and worked the circulation back into them. Then he sat up weakly and looked out the viewport, a wan smile on his lips.

Far away was a broad band of star studded sky. Several lines of light flashed diagonally across the viewport.

"Ahla-ahloa!" Craig cried. "She's gone!"

"I saw as soon as you did," Meeral's mental voice said. "I see she's gone."

"Then she's dead," Craig said. He sank back on the seat, giving way to his grief. "I wish I was dead," he groaned.

"When you wish that now you have to include me," Meeral said harshly. "Maybe she isn't dead. Maybe her world lines joined into closed circles so that she's a universe all by herself now."

"That would be worse," Craig groaned.

"Not the way I see it," Meeral said. "The Z charges that make up her psyche are there too. In time maybe worlds will form from the material substance of her body. Life might come into existence on them. Those Z charges could find incarnation in that life. Things are always relative. In the far distant future it's entirely within reason that there could spring up a whole new race of human beings whose souls would be sparks from her greater soul."

"And their material bodies flesh of her flesh," Craig said. "I really believe you must be right, Meeral. The pattern of creation repeats itself on all planes of existence. I—I'll try to cling to that belief. In a way, I envy her. When I die my parts will be lost in the whole of some universe so great I'm only an insignificant part of it. She will be the ALL."

"It's a wonderful thought, anyway," Meeral said. "But of course there's still another possibility."

"What's that?" Craig asked. He was finding that Meeral could conceal his thoughts just as effectively as though they didn't both reside in the same brain.

"I've been thinking," Meeral said slowly. "A few days from now you'll realize that right now your thoughts are more than a little hysterical. I

(Concluded On Page 194)

The MAN

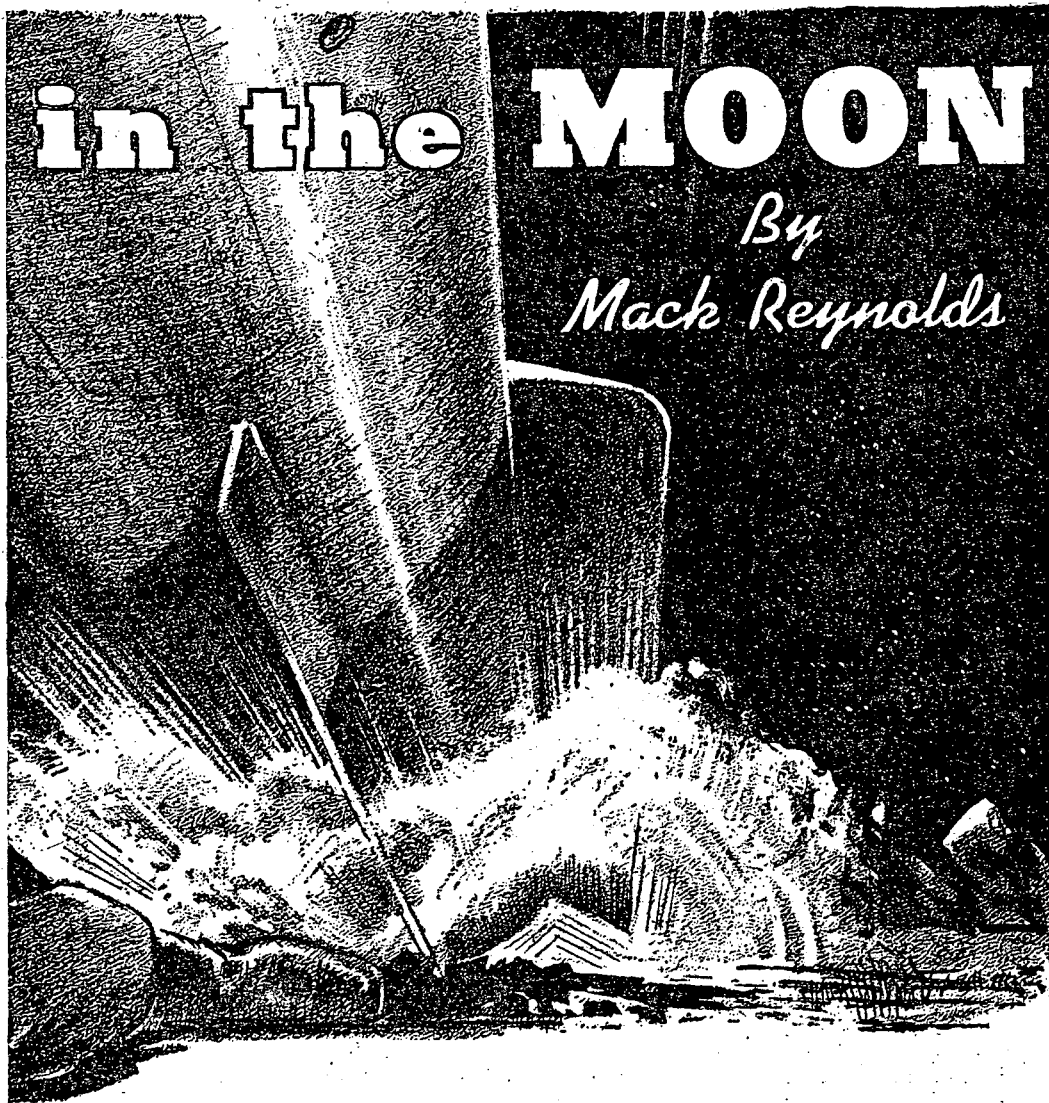
Can man reach the moon today? Is it possible to cross the void? A story similar to the one you read here may be in tomorrow's paper!



The lesser gravity of the moon seemed to retard his movements, even as the huge bulk plunged toward him

in the MOON

*By
Mack Reynolds*



"...to send an unmanned rocket to the moon and let it crash... is close enough to present technological accomplishments so that its design and construction are possible without any major inventions. Its realization is essen-

tially a question of hard work and money.

"The manned moonship is a different story. The performance expected of it is, naturally, that it take off from earth, go to the moon, land, take off from the

moon, and return to earth. And that... is beyond our present ability."

—from *Conquest of Space* by Willy Ley, published 1949

"For military security reasons—Terra was still governed by numerous antagonistic, warlike nations—the first interplanetary travel was not disclosed to the public for approximately a year after it had been successfully accomplished. The first base on Luna was established by the United States, a capitalistic nation which existed on the North American continent during the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries."

—from the *Encyclopedia Galactica*, published 2355 A. D.

THE THREE didn't have to be told this was it, but had they not already known, the general's mannerisms would have betrayed the importance of the occasion. He stood, West Point rigid, and cleared his throat characteristically before speaking.

"More than two years ago you gentlemen volunteered with some forty others for particularly hazardous duty. Only in the past six months have you learned what this duty was to be." He rumbled in his throat again. "Your names have been chosen by lot from among the thirty-two remaining of the original group. You still have the opportunity of withdrawing—your last opportunity."

Fred Gabowski and Jeff Stevens stirred in their chairs, Matt Evans sat impassively; nothing was said.

The general went on. "I should warn you that Stoddard, McCay and Bently didn't get through." He eyed

them, one at a time. "All right," he rapped, as though irritated at their continued silence, "this is your final briefing. It is now X-20."

He handed them charts reproduced on tissue thin paper. "You should be as familiar with these by now, as with your own faces, however, it is unknown what mental strains you may be under, so you will each take a copy."

He shot a glance at his watch, cleared his throat and went on, "Briefly, the situation is this: We have fired almost one hundred rockets in all, directing them at Alphonsus Crater. Of these, nearly half reached Luna; only sixteen, however, landed in Alphonsus. Of the others, two or three are in Albategnius, six in Arzachel, five in Ptolemaeus. All should be recovered eventually but that does not concern us at present; we are interested in the sixteen in Alphonsus.

"Three types of rockets have been used. Neptune IX, the model that first crashed on Luna, is represented twice among the sixteen in Alphonsus. The payload was negligible and since they contained insufficient fuel for breaking it is to be assumed they have been completely shattered, landing as they did at the speed of over seven thousand miles an hour.

"The second type of rocket utilized, Neptune XII, is our freighter. In them we have attempted to carry a payload of as high as one ton. Fourteen of them, of eighty-three fired, landed in Alphonsus Crater; to what extent they were damaged we are uncertain.

"The final type, Neptune XIII, is designed to carry a payload of approximately three hundred pounds, and as you know, carries a pilot. Thus far, of the three fired, none made Alphonsus." He cleared his throat again, shot another glance at his wristwatch. "Any questions, thus far?"

Matt Evans asked softly. "What happened to McCay, Bently and Stoddard?" He'd been Dick McCay's roommate for almost a year.

THE GENERAL had relaxed somewhat as he talked, now he stiffened again. "Lieutenant McCay's rocket exploded at about two hundred and fifty miles, just as he was leaving earth's atmosphere. We don't know what happened to Captain Bently; our telescopes gave no indication that he reached Luna at all. Colonel Stoddard landed in Arzachel Crater, about fifty miles from his destination. At this time, we don't know whether or not he is alive." He anticipated the next question. "He had oxygen for eight days... Anything else?"

The general went on, "Colonel Stoddard was to be in command of the Luna base; Major Gabowski will now take his place." He rumbled in his throat. "Captain Evans will be second in command and in...er—emergency, will take over."

Jeff Stevens had barely heard the last. Inwardly he tingled. So Larry Stoddard was dead.

The general was still speaking. "*Brennschluss* will be reached on your booster after only three seconds. *Brennschluss* on your first step rocket will be reached at approximately fifty miles altitude; your second will see you well out of earth's atmosphere. You'll have about eight minutes of acceleration in all." He hesitated, then rapped. "We've been afraid you might not have quite sufficient fuel for a safe landing on Luna, consequently, we're giving you an acceleration of slightly more than four gravities, in an attempt to stretch out your supply.

"We're also cutting down on your oxygen supply to a total of six days. The others had eight. If you land in Alphonsus, six will be ample; if you don't, you'll probably be better off

with the smaller amount. The extra capacity will be used for fuel."

The general's eyes flicked to his watch. "X-5 gentlemen." They came to their feet hurriedly.

"One last word. We have just heard through Intelligence that our potential enemy has succeeded in establishing a Space Station. I'm not going to point out what this means; you know. The important thing is that we have less time than we thought. Either a Space Station or a Luna base completely dominates earth in the military sense; we must have one to counterbalance theirs." He snorted indignantly. "Every authority on the subject knew the Station in Space was the practical first step, but, no, we have to get our appropriations through men who are motivated by the fact that a base on Luna sounds more glamorous than a pseudo-satellite spinning around Terra at an altitude of approximately six hundred and fifty miles."

They filed out past him from the concrete blockhouse into the cold New Mexico dawn. He shook their hands and cleared his throat apologetically as they went. He didn't expect to see any of them again.

Captain Jeff Stevens knew it was deliberate, this waiting until the last moment before they were informed of the flight. The psycho-technicians had figured it that way; they didn't want you to have time to get your wind up. A red star shell blossomed over the blockhouse; two minutes to go.

They trotted to the concrete firing tables, each to his own ship. Stevens had only seconds to drink in the surroundings. Not that he wasn't already thoroughly familiar with them. It was just, well—

THE SMALL plateau, principally man-made, on the twelve thou-

sand foot mountain. The fuel trucks, now empty and at a discreet distance from the heavy concrete aprons which supported the would-be spaceships. The almost indestructible blockhouse with its ten foot thick walls, its pyramidal roof, twenty-seven feet thick. The spaceships themselves, the three of them; massive, tremendous, with their boosters and two steps aggregating well over two hundred tons.

He scurried up the ladder to *Alice*, the name he'd inwardly chosen long ago for the Neptune XIII that would be assigned him. From the corner of his eye he could see Evans and Gabowski entering their craft.

Alice was almost lost in the bulks of *Step One* and *Step Two*. Her stubby wings were merged into the second step rocket, which in its turn was almost completely lost in the gigantic first step.

He was inside and lashing his slight body into the gimbals surrounded acceleration chair which would be his home for the next four days—if he was lucky. For the next four minutes, perhaps, if not.

It was seconds now. Suddenly his naturally nervous temperament boiled over, he wanted to scream, "NO!" He ran a thin hand over chin and mouth. He took it all back; his volunteering for this mad escapade was all a mistake; it was suicide!

He could sense, almost *feel*, valves opening, pumps beginning to stir; the liquid hydrogen and the ozone of the booster device beginning to gush into the booster motor. The initial ignition.

The roar began, audible, easily audible, even within his tiny compartment in the nose of *Alice*. It rose heavily, thunderously, penetratingly. This was it; there was nothing that could be done now. Outside, someone was yelling, "Rocket away!" But he was spared hearing that.

He could feel the chair give beneath him, gently. The booster was lifting the heavy mass from the firing table; in seconds *step one* would take over and the four gravities acceleration would begin. His eyes darted about the small cubicle, checking; as though there was anything he could do, even if something was wrong.

The acceleration chair sank deeply and the grip of the four gravities seized his small bulk as though to crush him. He felt darkness closing in. The general had said that in order to stretch fuel they were going to be given more than the four gravities for which they'd been trained; evidently, they were getting considerably more.

He could feel the *Alice* tilt sharply, roughly ninety degrees, and through the numbness momentarily felt another edge of fear; something had gone wrong. Then he realized the automatic tilting mechanism was in operation, directing the ship to the point Luna would occupy four days in the future, taking advantage of the velocity of the earth's rotation. Of necessity, the rocket had been fired vertically, but now it had assumed its true course.

He felt, as well as heard, the roar of the rockets diminish then swell again. He'd reached *Brennschluss* of *step one*, it had burned out and fallen away, leaving *Alice* and *step two* to go on by themselves. Shortly, *step two* would drop away as well and the comparatively small bulk of *Alice* would continue alone.

It occurred to him that the ship was already invisible from the base. Possibly they could still see the flame of his jets, but that too would be gone in seconds.

AND SUDDENLY it was over, unbelievably over. From the crush of more than four gravities he felt

sudden relief. The acceleration was falling off, not all at once, but rapidly. His breathing, slightly labored before, now eased. He'd reached a speed of nearly seven miles per second; the escape velocity from Terra, and the integrating accelerometer had cut the motors.

The important phase of the trip was accomplished. He had the speed now to carry *Alice* to that point, about 215,000 miles from earth, where he would begin to fall moonward. That would be the crisis. Would he have the fuel to brake his fall; to direct *Alice* to Alphonsus Crater? Any other point of landing would mean as certain death as though he had blown up in space.

The full effect of free flight was now upon him. Lashed as he was in the acceleration chair, he remained stationary, but he could *feel* the weightlessness that would be his until the motors cut in again. At the same time, his deep fears dropped away. The psychotechnicians had said they'd feel this way; it was principally the subsonic vibrations. The rocket motors had set up noise from all the registers of which sound is possible, and hadn't halted there; the human ear hadn't been able to pick up the subsonic notes, but the fear that accompanies them had been present.

It was quiet. After the roar of the motors, it was impossibly quiet. And that was the most startling feature of his experience; he hadn't thought of that—how still it would be.

He said experimentally, "Well, this is it," and felt foolish at the touch of braggadocio in his voice.

It came to him that he hadn't looked out as yet. He shot a hand over to the shutter which covered the plastic window to his right, and swore when it flew up against the metal shutter. He hadn't corrected for the

complete lack of gravity. He'd have to get used to this; he tried again and the shutter slid back easily.

Black, black space surrounded him. He peered behind for earth, a hollowness in his belly. There it was beneath him; he could see faint outlines on the massive ball; the Pacific, the Atlantic, most of North America. Extensive cloud formations looked like patches of snow on the ground.

His stare went out into space itself. Bright, and endlessly more numerous than he'd ever seen while earthbound, the stars filled the sky in all directions. Off to one side, the sun startled him with its appearance; a halo, a luminous crown, encircled its blinding brightness. He realized it was the corona, lying outside the chromosphere, or region of colored prominences, and visible on earth only during a total eclipse.

He could barely make out, near the sun, his destination. Luna! From here it looked small and inconsequential, with the tremendous bulk of Terra dwarfing it at one extent, the brilliant Sol on the other.

HE FELT, vaguely, that something was wrong with his sense of balance, and recalled that the medical authorities at the base had worried about that angle. They had been of the opinion that the one organ in the whole human organism that would be effected by the complete lack of gravity in space flight would be the organ of balance, those liquid filled tubes in the inner ear. They had been of the opinion, too, that other organs would quickly improvise means of circumventing the trouble. He shrugged; at least, he'd soon know.

Certainly, there was no reason to believe any other organs would refuse to operate. None of them, stomach, lungs, heart, kidneys, intestines,

depended upon gravitation to function.

In some respects this first space flight was like the first airplane ride he had experienced as a child of twelve. It had seemed, when he climbed into the plane, that the whole trip must be the most fascinating experience that could ever happen. But after watching the ground drop away, after looking down at the earth below and seeing it from the different perspective; after trying to spot roads, cars, hills, towns, the airplane ride became just a trifle boring. You quickly accepted the new things to be seen—and then there was nothing more.

So it was in space. After a comparatively short period of extreme interest in Terra's new appearance, as it slowly lessened in size, after the new aspect of the stars and of Sol and the destination, Luna, interest gave way to boredom, and he grunted inwardly at the prospect of being confined for four days to this tiny cubicle.

He checked the fuel gauges. They didn't tell him definitely if there was going to be enough or not; it would depend on just how much he was going to need for the unpredictable, the amount for corrections as he tried to settle in Alphonsus. Certainly he wouldn't have much to spare.

That brought Colonel Stoddard to mind. What had happened to Larry Stoddard? He'd made it safely away from Terra—while Dick McCay had blown up at the point of leaving earth's atmosphere. He'd even made it to Luna—while Bently became lost somewhere inbetween. But he hadn't made the right point. He'd missed Alphonsus and landed fifty miles away in the neighboring crater of... what was it the general had said?... yeah, Arzachel.

He wondered if Alice Stoddard knew her husband had died trying to

make the initial landing on Luna. No, of course not; she didn't even know to what service he belonged, thinking him an Air Forces officer. Jeff Stevens snorted in protest. Here Stoddard McCay, Bently, Evans, Gabowski and himself were—three of them already dead in the attempt—trying to establish an American base on Luna, and their countrymen weren't aware of the effort. Didn't even know there was a fledgling Space Service in the armed forces of the nation.

He was trying to wrench his mind away from Alice Stoddard, but it wasn't working. There'd never been anyone for him but Alice. He made a wry face; now there probably never would be.

It had been Alice for months, for years. For one reason or another, they'd put off their marriage a half dozen times. It'd been bad for the morale of both, but there hadn't been any alternative. The last time had been a year ago; he'd received orders shifting him to New Mexico and again the wedding was *temporarily* postponed.

When next he saw Alice she was Mrs. Larry Stoddard.

JEFF STEVENS shook his head sharply. He wasn't going to be able to spend the next four days crying in his beer. That was behind now, the important things were ahead.

It wouldn't be a bad idea to check his supplies. The total payload of his Neptune XIII was three hundred pounds. He took up almost a hundred and twenty pounds of that, complete with clothes. It would have been a hundred and thirty once, but they'd starved him down to the lowest point consistent with health, before the blast-off. Every *ounce* counted here; he and Stoddard and the rest had been chosen for their size primarily.

He checked his water, finding two quarts of it. His eyes widened in disbelief; surely they didn't expect two quarts of water—. He quickly investigated his food supply. There was none—not really; some chocolate, a few squares, a modicum of dried beef, a half dozen different types of pills. They were insane! How did they expect him to live...? He ran his hand nervously over his chin and mouth, pinched his lower lip.

Jeff Stevens drew up short, conquering the fright that had momentarily risen to the surface. The water and food here were enough to carry him to Luna; if he didn't make Luna, it didn't make any difference. If he did, every ounce that might have been expended on carrying water or food, was better used otherwise—for fuel. He stared at the pills and dried beef sourly. What had he expected, Turkey dinner?

Deliberately tearing his mind away from food and drink, he forced it to consider other aspects of his situation. It came to mind that he was traveling at the speed of twenty-five thousand miles an hour; except for the other five who were on this same mission, no man had ever reached that before. He felt no sensation of velocity whatsoever; they'd told him he wouldn't, that the human body senses *changes* in velocity, but has no way of detecting speed itself. He might as well be doing a hundred thousand miles an hour, or be stationary; there was no sensation.

Actually, of course, his speed was slowly falling off. After *Alice* had reached *Brennschluss*, at roughly seven miles per second speed, the motors were cut and now the earth's gravitational attraction was knocking off just short of thirty-two feet per second of velocity each second. The way it had been planned, he would be traveling at as low as a few feet a second by

the time he reached the dividing line between the gravities of Terra and Luna.

HE SLID back the shutter on his left and looked out. The view was essentially the same. He remembered that there had been some debate about the advisability of the plastic windows, and shuddered at the thought of not having them. To be enclosed in this closet-sized cubicle without any way of seeing out, without reading material—the weight couldn't be afforded—without any manner of spending his time; without even a watch to check the passing of that time. He would have gone stark raving mad.

Perhaps he would yet; even with the windows. Perhaps that was what had happened to Colonel Stoddard. He tried to drive the thought from his mind. Why did he continually return to the man? Larry Stoddard, five feet four inches and one hundred and twenty pounds of Georgia born and bred, would-be aristocrat. Ever since they'd first met, Jeff Stevens' personality had clashed with the other's.

And it was one occasion in which the dislike couldn't be blamed on a subconscious antagonism brought about by his inferiority complex. Jeff Stevens was aware that he went through life like a nervous bantam rooster, trying to prove to the world and to himself that he was as big as the next man. Actually, his volunteering for this...

There he went again. He had four days and more of this time on his hands. If he couldn't keep his mind from doing cartwheels he was going to be loony by the time he reached Luna. He grinned sourly; he'd have to remember that pun in case he ever got the chance to tell the story of this trip.

There was no night and no day; there was no sound and there was nothing to do; there was practically no food to eat and little water to drink. And this lasted for four days.

There was nothing to do but sit and think.

Even the fraction of weight of a watch had been begrudged him. He slept fitfully a score of times, not knowing for how long; it might have been minutes or hours.

Luna was growing in the sky now; larger than earth. Jeff Stevens had no feeling of velocity, but he knew his speed must have fallen off tremendously. Somewhere in here he was going to touch that line of equality of gravitational attraction between Terra and its satellite, then he'd stop *rising* from earth and start *falling* toward its moon.

He checked carefully with the light, simple instruments they'd allowed him as part of the *Alice's* payload and estimated he was some four thousand miles off Luna now; too soon to start braking if he wanted to combine that operation with steering his craft toward Alphonsus Crater.

He watched now, excitedly. He could already pick out land-marks: Ptolemaeus, about ninety miles across; Albategnius, about eight miles in diameter; Arzachel, the crater in which Stoddard had crashed, some sixty miles. And Alphonsus, his target, sixty-five miles in diameter.

He ran his hand over his mouth and chin nervously, and felt warm sweat on his palms. The game was to wait but all his instincts were to try and do something, to try and guide the *Alice* toward its goal.

He must control himself. Fuel was life.

IT WAS TIME to turn the rocket about so that its rocket tube tail

would point in the direction of Luna. A simple wheel, mounted universally and hand operated, accomplished this. His ship, its tanks still containing the fuel necessary for braking, weighed some five tons. The wheel weighed five pounds; by spinning it two thousand revolutions, the ship turned against the momentum until its direction was reversed.

The instruments which would control his landing were automatic; most of them, at least. His job, as pilot, was to so direct the firing of his remaining fuel that he set the *Alice* down in the designated area. He watched anxiously for any indication that additional directional firing at this altitude would be necessary; thus far it didn't seem to be.

He figured his best bet would be to wait until the last moment before braking, thus being able to check best on Alphonsus. Actually, all he'd need was a bit over two minutes, if he was willing to take the physical hardship of the higher acceleration.

This was it!

He touched the ignition switch, moved his hands desperately. The motors came to life, roaring, moaning, *howling*!

He was directly above Alphonsus; the original aim had been perfect. The four gravities hit him like a sledge; for a period of four days he'd lived in free space, weightless, now he was returning not merely to earth gravity but to four times it.

But he couldn't afford to black out! If ever, he had to remain conscious; the many months of training came to stand him in good stead now. He kept at his controls.

He was down! Unbelievably, he was down. The *Alice* was resting on her hydraulic stilts in Alphonsus Crater; he'd succeeded—thus far.

The four gravities were gone and in

their place was Luna's normal gravity, approximately one sixth of Terra's. It didn't seem over strange, at that. His four days without gravity at all prepared him for the experience.

This was it then; and there was no time to sit and philosophize. He had only hours of time before his oxygen supply was gone; besides, he needed food and water—but quick. His inactive four days in the *Alice* had used little energy and he'd been able to get by with the chocolate, the pills and the pint of water per twenty-four hours. But it was different now.

He peered through his plastic windows. The view wasn't as strange as it might have been; there were portions of New Mexico and Arizona which didn't look so very different. The ringwall surrounding the crater was high and spectacular, somewhat like the Sierra Nevadas seen from the east; the floor seemed to be covered with fine sand or pumice, perhaps dust would be the more accurate term. A supreme wasteland, beautiful in its desolation.

Man was on Luna at last, but he had no time for seeking the answers to the problems which had baffled the astronomers so long. No time to discover the true nature of the *rills* and *rays*. No time to explore the Crater Plato to find if there was moisture there; no time to discover the nature of the smooth floor of the ninety mile long Great Valley; no time for the snow storms on Mount Pico, nor the possible clouds or vegetation in Eratosthenes Crater. No time for any of the riddles of the moon.

Jeff Stevens was fighting desperately for life.

HE BROUGHT out the small, lightweight telescope and searched the floor of Alphonsus. The general had said fourteen of the

freighter rockets had landed; where each had touched in relation to himself was another question. Gabowski's and Evans' rockets would bring the number up to sixteen—if they'd made it.

He was about twenty miles from the ringwall; roughly ten from the small central peak of the crater. It was about as good a position as he could have chosen. But now pure luck was involved.

He picked up one of the freighters almost immediately. It lay on its side not more than four or five miles away; a Neptune XII, painted blue; food, water, medical supplies, utensils. Relief flooded through him, but he withstood the urge to make for it immediately. Hungry and thirsty though he was, there were more pressing problems.

Continuing his search he located three more of the freighter rockets, varying in color and at varying distances, but he could find no trace of Gabowski and Evans. Fear was beginning to well up inside him, he brushed his hand over mouth and chin nervously, but then he picked up in the small scope that item which was most necessary to his survival, a checkerboard painted craft which lay about twelve or fifteen miles away.

Triumphant, he unslashed himself from the acceleration chair and stiffly climbed into the space suit. They'd had practice in the clumsy things as part of their training, but how they'd work on Luna was something else. He shrugged; no use worrying about it, he'd soon know.

As he dressed, his mind couldn't help turning to the others. Of course, they could well be out of range of vision; perhaps hid by the central peak, perhaps too far away on the other side of the crater for him to detect. It would have been better if

all three of them could have gotten together immediately—but he could make out by himself.

He gobbled the last two bits of chocolate; hesitated, but forewent the remaining gill of water. Using the mechanical arms, he slipped the plastic helmet over his head, checked the valves and cogs, and opened the small circular door in *Alice's* side.

No time to stand and stare; no time for Columbus-like emotions; no time for some fitting words for future history books.

He began to work his way down the side of the hull, stepping clumsily in the indentations which comprised the ladder arrangements for entry and exit from *Alice*. It was about forty-five feet to the ground.

It didn't make much difference what caused the slip; he didn't bother to investigate later; possibly one of the hydraulic stilts was emplaced in a spot less secure than the other three. At any rate, Jeff Stevens could feel it give way when he was about half down. He remembered, even as he fell, the negligible gravity, and knew there would be considerably less consequence than on Terra. He struck the ground and rolled desperately to avoid being struck by the collapsing *Alice*.

ALMOST, HE made it. A crumbling wing, caught his left arm immediately above the elbow and he felt the bone grate, then crush. His lips drew back and he gritted his teeth. The arm was broken.

He sat there for a long moment in the dust of Alphonsus Crater, pale-faced and shaken. Finally he came to his feet, still clumsily, and dragged his mind back to quiet contemplation of his situation; this was no time for panic. His first tendency was to make for the blue freighter, only four miles off. He could set his arm there, find

food and water, rest for a few days, possibly the other two would be located by then...

The thought *rest a few days* cleared his mind of that possibility. The days were fourteen times the length of earth's. This was toward the end of the lunar day. The period had been chosen deliberately. In mid-day, the temperature on the satellite was well above the boiling point of water. By sunset, it cooled to the point of freezing and in the night the temperature drop was tremendous. He had only a short time to prepare—too short, even without a broken limb.

He gave up the thought of immediate care, immobilized his left arm to the extent possible within the space-suit and began to make his way to the checkerboard rocket, a dozen miles away.

It had been expected when the suit was designed that the occupant would be able to travel rather rapidly on the face of Luna. Perhaps under ordinary circumstances that might have been true; the light gravity should have enabled him to have progressed by a series of jumps that would have eaten up miles. But only a few minutes of experimentation along this line taught him his broken arm wouldn't stand that treatment.

He finally worked out a method which was a cross between skating and a long stride that was somewhat faster and somewhat easier than walking on Terra, but was still considerably slower than he'd hoped.

The darkish dust through which he plowed had the consistency of the dry snow you find in the mountains of the Southwest. He started out doggedly; the arm throbbing protest.

Enough of the day's heat was still upon Luna to make him aware, painfully aware, of the fact that he'd only had half a gallon of water in the

past four and a half days. His mouth was cloth-dry, and every step was taking him further from his nearest source of food and drink. The food he could forego for the time, although he felt pangs in his long empty stomach.

He fingered his chin nervously, inside the space suit. Suppose what he sought in the checkerboard rocket was damaged. Suppose it couldn't be utilized. He was afraid he'd never be able to make it back to the *Alice* and then on, another four miles, to the water supply in the blue rocket.

He walked for ages, stumbled, skated, slithered. His arm was shooting pains, burning, protesting. His half stupified mind wondered how long it would be before gangrene set in, before the tissues of his arm began to decay.

JEFF STEVENS had been trudging, plodding, over the crater floor for endless hours; he should be getting there; if he didn't soon—. He climbed wearily up the ringwall of a *bead*, one of those miniature craters, only a few hundred yards across, within craters; when he made the top he was able to spot his goal, but there was something else that drew his attention. The tiny crater, upon whose ringwall he stood, was a newly created one. He could spot pieces of torn titanium alloy, the material of which the rockets had principally been built. The *bead* was man-made by the crash landing of one of the two Neptune IX models which had first successfully reached Luna, but without a payload and without braking fuel.

The extent of the *bead* was startling. He had a quick flash of what it would have meant to him if his motors had refused to ignite when he came in for his landing. Possibly this is what had happened to Larry Stoddard in

Arzachel Crater.

For the first time, as he made his way back down the *bead's* ringwall, the full significance of Stoddard's death came to him. Alice was free! Alice Stoddard was a widow!

Her marriage hadn't been a successful one; the fact that she'd made a mistake must have been evident to her from the beginning. Swept by indignation and despair over the continual wedding postponements, she must have had long hours of wondering whether or not he was sincere, and must have accepted and married Larry Stoddard during such a period of doubt.

And Stoddard? Jeff wondered how much of his desire to marry Alice had been a matter of spite. Certainly, only weeks afterward it was obvious to both that the wedding had been foolish. But the Stoddards of Georgia, *suh*, never got divorces; and Alice was the kind that played the game, no matter how harsh the rules—so they remained in their caricature of marital bliss.

Did Alice still love him,—Jeff Stevens?

He tried to tear his mind back to the present; this sort of thing could crack him. Had his own marriage to Alice gone through he might have never been here now; he might have been on Terra planning a home, children, security—looking forward to a long life.

He laughed bitterly, dryly, into his helmet. Here he was, instead, trying to prove that in spite of his size he was a man.

The arm had become almost unbearably painful. He was convinced he'd made a mistake in not going immediately to the other rocket; the arm should have been attended to first; he could have gotten codeine there, or morphine perhaps, anything to clear

his mind of this pain.

The checkerboard rocket loomed before him now, laying there on its side. Twelve miles, it couldn't have been more; it felt like fifty.

As he plodded up to its side, he wondered dully if the contents had been damaged. This model rocket had some slight advantages over the *Alice*. The initial velocity hadn't been limited by the four gravities acceleration toadying to a human occupant; the fuel had been expended in a more efficient manner. But, on the other hand, the attempted pay load was approximately a ton; considerably more than *Alice* had carried.

THE NEPTUNE XII didn't look particularly damaged. Mentally he crossed his fingers, hoping the release mechanism on the hatch at the nose wasn't jammed. It wasn't. Utilizing the thin metal arms that projected from the spacesuit, he threw the heavy snap that released it, and pulled the hatchcover off.

Inside, nestled in a spiderweb of shock-proof rigging, was the tiny tractor.

He knew it well. Weighing approximately five hundred pounds, built principally of the titanium alloys used so widely in the rockets themselves, and powered by alcohol and liquid oxygen, the toy-like tractor was a miracle of engineering.

Jeff Stevens blessed the foresight of the men who'd planned the unloading of the freight rockets. Hadn't it all been made childishly simple, he'd never have managed with his one arm. As it was, it took more than an hour before the little tractor was standing, ready for operations, on the crater floor.

There was no seat and no instruments, they'd been sacrificed to light-weight and simplicity. He perched

himself on the fuel tanks and checked the controls. This now was crucial. He flicked a switch, spun the miniature crank. The engine coughed stubbornly then caught; he could feel the vibration beneath him. Oddly, there was no sound, then he realized, all over again, that there would never be sound on Luna; there was no atmosphere.

He let in the clutch and the tractor chugged forward doggedly. Its motion sent new waves of agony from his crushed arm, but he could bear that now; he threw it into high which was slow enough but preferable to his staggering trip on foot.

Back at the *Alice* in a bit over an hour, he hesitated only long enough for the remaining gill of water and for a new oxygen container for his spacesuit, then proceeded to chug toward the blue rocket beyond. Fatigue was beginning to hit him hard now, but he could make it; the battle was too nearly won to lose by physical shortcomings.

When he reached it, he hesitated a long moment before deciding that he could wait for the food and water. He scooted his tiny vehicle to the nose of the Neptune XII, attached the tractor's thin cable to the ring in the prow, climbed aboard again and threw the gears into low. The tractor grunted, groaned, and began to lurch forward.

It took another hour to drag it back to the *Alice*.

He gave up then, almost collapsing; cut the engine of the tractor and broke into the nose compartment of the blue rocket for its water, its food, *its pain relieving drugs*. Things went blank then; later he didn't remember, but evidently he'd drank something, ate something, did up his arm as well as possible.

When he awoke, he was back in the acceleration chair of *Alice*, still wear-

ing the spacesuit with the exception of the helmet. His slight body ached with physical exhaustion, it had never been meant to take this degree of punishment; the broken arm still throbbed agonizingly.

He forced himself to break out his telescope, and searched the crater for signs of Gabowski and Evans. He considered running up some sort of signal above his two rockets so that they could spot him, but gave it up. Had they been alive, they would already have contacted him, made their way to him. *If they were alive*— why pussy-foot—if they were incapacitated, hurt, he had no time for rescue operations. The truth was bitter, coldblooded; the impassive Matt Evans, the easy going Major Gabowski, either might be out there somewhere, needing only a modicum of assistance to survive. But he had the work of at least three men to do; and only one arm with which to do it.

He searched again, this time for a green-painted Neptune XII, and found it, further away than he would have hoped for, but within possible distance.

JEFF STEVENS cranked up the tractor, mounted the fuel tanks again and started out. The sun was in the first stages of setting and wouldn't take long to go down entirely. Already the excessive heat of a few hours ago was changing to deep cold. Of course, earthlight would always be with him; some sixty times as bright as moonlight on Terra, earthlight would always give him sufficient illumination to even read in comfort. It was the cold that had to be fought.

Six or seven hours later he had managed to tow the new rocket to the side of the blue one. It might have been well at this point to look further, to bring up more of the

freighters, but he wasn't sure just how long he could go on. He'd better make permanent camp here and now.

Engineering genius had gone into the contriving of the method for connecting the rockets. Even with the throbbing, agonizing arm he was able, by use of the tractor and the few tools provided him, to join them, to pull out the fuel tanks which had occupied most of their interiors, to remove and discard the turbines and pump assemblies; to make airtight the hulls.

The *Alice* he left intact. Later, much later, probably, she might be used for the return. First he would have to locate several of the red freighters with their cargoes of fuel; first he would have to do a good many things. There was no immediate reason for an attempt to return. Besides, as things were now, it would be extremely difficult for him to repair her stubby wing and her stilts and to get her upright again. Yes, preparation for the return to Terra would have to wait.

When the interiors of the two freighters were cleared he rearranged the payload of the green one. The quantities of pumpkin plants were placed in the sterns of the rocket hulls. There was enough potential oxygen here for a considerably larger number of colonists than Luna supported at present. Besides, there were at least two more of the plant laden freighters in the crater. He could haul them in and attach them to the rest of the settlement at his leisure; at present, the acquisition of other supplements was more important.

A black freighter was only six or seven miles off. He refueled the tractor from the remnants of oxygen and alcohol in the tanks of the two freighters he'd already brought in, and made his way to the new one.

EIGHT HOURS later it was joined to the small group, connected with them so that the interiors of all, stripped of their tanks, motors, pumps and other accessories, were common. The new acquisition was filled with tools, refrigeration units, a heating system, two generating plants, one a solar plant which would have to be set up later when the sun arose again. Most immediately important was the equipment to make his rapidly growing establishment self-sufficient in regards to air and water.

The device drew the moisture thrown off from his body in breathing and perspiration from the air and condensed it, leaving pure distilled water, which, of course, could be used again and again. The carbon dioxide would be used by the pumpkin plants which would, in their turn, throw off oxygen sufficient for breathing purposes. He arranged the light system over the plants so that they could continue their work.

He caught himself whistling, over and over, as he worked, some tune that had been popular ten or more years ago, and frowned trying to place it. At last it came to him: *Little Man You've Had A Busy Day*. He grinned. Always before he had avoided even to himself, the fact that he was little.

Exhaustion was on him again. He worked on the arm, trying to set it, bandaging it more securely; then fell asleep.

The cold awakened him. The setting sun had brought freezing temperatures and the work was going to be harder now.

He forced himself to eat a hearty meal of the concentrated and dehydrated food. Eventually, hydroponics would be utilized on Luna, but as long as all food had to come from Terra, concentrates were the order. Actually,

the worst was over now. He was self-sufficient enough to carry on almost indefinitely. The immediate job was to drag in as many as possible of the remaining freighters but there wasn't any pressing hurry.

With his telescope he was able to spot three in all. One of them was red, fuel; one was green; another pumpkin plant load; the other was blue, food, water, medical supplies. He'd get the blue one first.

He'd arranged one freighter in such a manner that its nose compartment could be used as an airlock. Each time he left his base, he lost the air in that compartment; later, perhaps, some system of pumping could eliminate that loss, but for now he could get by.

His arm was less painful, but eventually he knew it would have to be re-broken and reset. There was nothing he could do about it for the present.

He refueled the tractor and made his way toward the blue rocket, some twenty miles off. It was going to be a long trip and a tiring one, and he settled himself stoically on the tiny vehicles' fuel tanks for the ride.

Less than a half mile from camp, he came upon the crumpled body. Behind it, leading from the ringwall, was a ragged, all explaining trail. The sloughing footprints through the dust were interspaced with disturbed spots where the stumbling figure had fallen, raised himself, staggered on, to fall again.

Jeff Stevens swore, crushed to a halt, jumped from the tractor and skated his way to the fallen figure.

IT WAS Colonel Larry Stoddard, his helmet torn off, his face an agony of asphyxiation, his dead eyes staring up at Terra there in the sky above them.

His face ashen and cold, Jeff Stevens bent over the frozen body.

Stoddard must have landed in Arzachel Crater ten days or so before and realized his only chance was to make it to Alphonsus on foot. He had probably had a small amount of liquid oxygen remaining in his fuel tanks after the crash; using it, he'd conserved his bottled oxygen for the spacesuit and remained in his rocket for a week, in hopes some of the others would make a successful landing in Alphonsus and prepare the base in time for his arrival.

He'd then plowed his way over the heights of the ringwall of Arzachel, then over the ringwall of Alphonsus by some superhuman effort, only to fail within sight of the base Stevens had established.

Larry Stoddard held something, a piece of paper, in one hand. Jeff Stevens worked one of the mechanical metal arms down into the suit and retrieved it. The paper read: "Suggestions for those that follow," and contained half a dozen items Stoddard had noted down as a result of his own experiences. It wound up, "Congrats to the spaceman who finds this, and so long.—L. S."

Jeff Stevens' face twitched uncontrollably. He stepped back and flicked the other as snappy a salute as was possible in the confining spacesuit.

"Last Brennschluss, spaceman," he whispered.

He stood there for a full five minutes, looking down at his rival. Larry Stoddard; when he realized he wasn't going to make it, had used his last efforts to make the way easier for those who followed. Deep within himself Jeff Stevens realized that even though he returned to Terra, Alice could never be anything to him

except *Mrs. Stoddard*, widow of a fallen comrade.

He returned to the tractor, cranked it up again and made his way back to the base. He was unbearably tired; securing the other freight rockets could wait; there was no special hurry for them.

He cut the tractor's engine and re-entered the base, stripped off the space suit and made his way to the small radar set. It was time to report.

He sat for a long time considering the message. It must contain a full report of the situation here; that he was established but that all the others were dead or missing.

Uncle Joe's intelligence boys must be aware that Uncle Sam was trying to reach Luna, but it was doubtful if they knew just how far Uncle had gotten. The important thing was to so disguise the message that the others would be misled, even if they managed to pick it up. Code was out, any code can be broken eventually. The thing was to word it in such a way that they couldn't get an accurate idea of the size of the establishment nor how long it had been in existence.

He looked about him. Here he was huddled within the confined space of several joined rockets, one arm broken and shaken and sick with fatigue. Colonel Stoddard, Major Gabowski, Captain Evans, each in turn who were to have commanded the expedition, were all dead. He was the only living person on Luna.

Jeff Stevens carefully tapped out:

SEVERAL CASUALTIES STOP
REQUEST REPLACEMENTS STOP
SIGNED STEVENS, OFFICER
COMMANDING, FORT LUNA,
UNITED STATES SPACE SERVICE



Patiently, with slide rule, paper and pencil, he fashioned a highway to his goal.

THEY'RE ALIVE ON MARS

By Paul Lohrman

Mars, the red planet, drew Sprague like a magnet. But he forgot that red can mean danger

I MET HIM in college under peculiar circumstances; a thin-bodied kid with big ears and a pair of the blackest eyes I've ever seen. We were freshmen and had been pledged to Omicron Pi and that was initiation night. We were in the basement under the frat house. A scowling sophomore gripping a big paddle called our names. "Langforth and Sprague," he said, and we stepped forward as directed. They gave each of us a dishpan full of water and made us bend over, holding the water a foot from the floor. We had to stand that way for five minutes and if we spilled a drop for any reason whatsoever, it meant scrubbing the floor.

Posing thus I felt the stinging whack of the soph's paddle on my backside. By desperate effort I held the pan steady. Then the paddle was poised above Sprague and I remember his ears were bright red as he straightened up, dropped his pan and turned on the sophomore. "This is absurd," he snapped, then turned and walked out.

It was an unprecedented occurrence. Never in the history of the school had a pledge bolted an initiation. Everyone, including myself, was thunderstruck.

I mention this incident for two reasons. It gives an insight into Jim Sprague's character; and it explains why I had him pretty much to myself for four years. He wasn't exactly blackballed for walking out on the initiation, but he *was* a marked man from that time on.

I don't know for what reason—possibly a spirit of brotherhood, our having stood together on the initiation floor—but on the following evening I looked him up. He had two rooms in a boarding house near the campus and the minute I walked in I smelled money.

He seemed glad to see me, quit the work he was doing at a desk, and got out a couple of bottles of beer. "Nice of you to come up," he said. "I suppose I'll be treated like a germ carrier from now on."

I pooh-poohed that and he said, "I'm just as glad. I haven't got the time, really. I'm not here for the social aspects of the thing. Don't know why I took that fool pledge to begin with."

Endeavoring to steer the talk away from the scene of his "disgrace", I asked him what his major was.

"Mathematics," he said; then, right there under my eyes, he started to bloom. That's the only way I can describe it. His black eyes lighted and his ugly ears seemed to diminish. He could have been speaking of a beautiful woman. "Mathematics. The first and the last; the beginning and the end; the skyscraper and the microbe." He leaned forward and tapped my knee. "You know the very secret of life—the origin of all matter is nothing more than a mathematical formula."

I said no, I didn't know that—was it? And he stopped long enough to be polite and ask me what I was taking. Journalism, I told him, but I wasn't a very good student and really didn't give much of a damn. My father owned a string of four dailies and decided I wouldn't run them into the ground quite so fast when my turn came if I had a little training beforehand.

He thought that was fine but he couldn't keep his mind on it with all those beautiful mathematics to talk about. "You know what I'm doing?" he enthused. "I'm looking ahead at the big problems I'll tackle some day, and I'm getting ready for them. The trouble with what they have in schools is that it doesn't go far enough. They don't have enough tools to work with."

"They don't?"

"No. It's like—well it's like trying to fix the motor of a car with a nail file and a pair of tweezers. That's the feeling I get sometimes. There's no motor built you can't repair if you have the proper tools. And there isn't a problem within scope of the human mind that can't be solved if you have the proper system of mathematics."

"What are you doing—building a new system?"

His eyes sparkled. "I'm inventing a master set of variables."

"You mean you're setting up some new numbers that will solve everything from why is a ball round to whether there's life on Mars?"

AS I MENTIONED the last, he glanced at me queerly. His eyes held for a moment and then he said, "Not quite that. My numbers, as you call them, will be a control system. I'm convinced that each major problem needs a special set of tools for the solving. My master system will point to the special tools needed."

It was too deep for me. It made my head ache and I asked for another beer. I don't think he realized that he handed it to me. His mind was way up in the abstract blue. "Just think of it! The sheer power of higher mathematics. Einstein sits in an easy chair with a pad and a pencil and evolves laws governing the whole universe!"

That was all right with me, but I was getting a little tired of Sprague's one-track mind. To me anything even remotely arithmetical was slightly nauseating.

In fact it seems strange—miles apart as we were in tastes, inclinations, and ambitions, that we hung together as we did. I had a room three blocks away and we fell into the habit of dropping in on each other without invitation. Probably the fact that we were such opposites was what did it. Sprague like a hot battery, overflowing with energy; and Mr. and Mrs. Langforth's white hope—well, pretty easy-going to say the least.

As time went on I got an ever-deeper insight into Jim's makeup and I never ceased marveling. It took quite a while but I finally admitted that here was genius. What, I began to wonder, was he doing around college? To me he appeared to be wasting his time. I couldn't figure out what he could possibly be learning because it was ob-

vicious he was away out of everyone's class including that of his teachers.

He graduated at the top of his roll and I got by somehow and there we were: Langforth eyeing his diploma somewhat regretfully, and Sprague glaring resolutely out beyond the stars.

We had a last dinner together before parting and it was that night he told me of his ambition. Possibly it will look a trifle silly on paper but I assure you it didn't sound that way to me coming from Jim's lips. I'd gotten to know my man.

"Billy," he said. "You know what my ambition is—what I'm working toward? I'm going to Mars."

"That so? When does the train leave?"

"I'm not kidding. I'm nineteen now. I figure twenty-six more years. Twenty-six years of study and work will do the trick. By that time I'll be ready and the world will be ready."

"What do you mean, the world will be ready? Is the world going with you?"

"No. It has to progress. Certain inventions have to come about first. Every man's work hinges on the effort of some other man. It's a little like this: One man has an idea for a machine to weave cloth but he hasn't anything to make it go, so he has to wait for some other brain to come along and invent a motor. Then he's all set. Space travel will be the work of many brains and other things will come first. I figure the world will be ready for space travel in twenty-six years. And I'm going to be the first man off the earth."

"But what do you want to go to Mars for? There's nothing up there but a lot of canals."

"I'm going there because it's the only other planet in our system that's inhabited. They're alive on Mars, all right."

"How in hell do you know that?"

"Because I proved it. I told you mathematics solve all problems. I worked for two and a half years with paper and pencil until I got the answer. I know there are people on Mars and I know about what they look like. I know what kind of vegetation and minerals they've got up there. I haven't figured out what I'll need to stay alive, but I've got plenty of time to work on that."

FROM THAT time on all my correspondence to Jim began: Dear Crackpot. There was quite a little of it at first. Jim went to Chicago for some kind of special studies, and I went home and got into my father's hair. He packed me off to Europe with a portable typewriter and I got drunk with all the boys over there so as not to cause them uneasiness because I was the boss' son.

I headquartered in Paris and found letters there from Jim but as the years passed they diminished in number. My answers of course, diminished too.

I saw him once while I was over there. He was attending some sort of a scientist's clambake in Berne, Switzerland, and he dropped in on me in Paris.

We had dinner together and I looked him over. Something had happened to him; something I couldn't quite put my finger on. He'd broadened and deepened. He'd grown greater in a way I found no words for. As a boy the genius of him had been inside. Now he wore it like an overcoat. He had that which made people turn uneasily in restaurants to pick him out at a table far across the room.

We talked of many things, then, as the evening wore on I became somewhat maudlin over the old days. "Remember when we left school? All those ambitions, son? If I remember rightly,

you were planning to fly to Mars."

"I'm still planning it."

"Now look here, Crackpot—"

"The equation is working out. It couldn't do anything else but work out. Thirteen years have past and it's on schedule right to the second. There's work being done on jet propulsion now. The war will step that up. The next ten years will be most productive. The X-point in the time phase of the equation spans a five-second period approximately seven years from now. That, I think, is when the bomb will go off—toward the last year of the war."

"What bomb? What war?"

— "You're a newspaperman," he said. "You should know more about that than I."

Whereupon I gave my deluded and theoretical friend some straight dope. "There isn't going to be any war, Jim. We've got our fingers right on the pulse, and the blood isn't flowing in that direction. If you refer to that crazy little house painter in Berlin—forget it. He's only bluffing."

This seemed to make Jim uneasy. His broad, magnificent forehead wrinkled and the black eyes clouded. "I don't *think* I made a mistake," he said, doubtfully. The variables are dead true. They point to *something*. Of course I have no concrete definitions but to my mind it has to be war."

"Not a chance."

I'd about ruined his evening. "If I could only get a little help," he complained. "That's what I came over here for. The smartest brains in the world were gathered at Berne and I talked to some of them. But they just don't seem to grasp it. I found only one man who could even vaguely encompass my variables."

"Son, why not face it? You'll never find anybody to check on you. You'll never know whether you're right or wrong because you're the only one

of your kind alive. There are only about fifteen brains on earth who can understand Einstein, and I'll bet Einstein himself wouldn't know what you're talking about."

"You may be right, but some day I'll hand them proof."

"I think maybe you will at that. And I want to be around to see their faces."

HE WENT back to the states after that and two years later Dad died suddenly of a heart attack. In the meantime I'd gotten interested in ancient languages and found the first genuine satisfaction I'd ever experienced digging around the dusty shelves of European languages.

Jim's war popped on schedule after Chamberlain forgot to raise his umbrella when the rains came. The day Hitler marched I thought of Jim.

I thought of him again when the government called all the press heads to that historic meeting—the great hush-hush conclave where a brass hat cleared his throat, scowled and said, "Gentlemen—we have a bomb—"

The Manhattan Project. I went with a group to Chicago to look over some of the work at the university out there. The first hand poked in my direction was that of Jim Sprague.

"On schedule?" I asked.

"On schedule."

"And they're still alive on Mars?"

"They're still alive on Mars."

I knew then that I wasn't a newspaperman at heart. Keeping the great news off the streets was pure hell to the profession. They wrote the story and filed it away and they lived in outraged misery waiting for the bomb to fall.

It bothered me not at all. Then came Jim's five seconds ushering in a new age; the atomic era; the moment when the gods handed man the club with which to bat out his own brains if he

so chose to do such a thing.

The war ended and I sold the newspaper chain my father left me and at that moment there was an earthy rumble—the old gentleman turning over in his grave I was sure. But it was merely another atom bomb going off in the Pacific.

I went to Europe then, and spent three years in search of old manuscripts. It was in Alexandria that I got the wire. It was from Jim Sprague. It read:

THE TIME IS NOW OH UN-
BELIEVER STOP WILL HAVE
A CAR AT TUCSON ARIZONA
AIRPORT ON THE THIRD
STOP COME AND WATCH
THE FACES STOP THEY'RE
ALIVE ON MARS ALL RIGHT
STOP

I left my toothbrush in Egypt and had to buy another one in New York. I crossed the continent without even seeing it—far above the clouds and discovered Jim's car wasn't a car at all. It was a small helicopter piloted by a young Irishman who had evidently been told to keep his mouth shut. He wouldn't even affirm my opinion that it was a nice day and I spent a few hours floating over a desert that was seemingly without beginning or end.

Darkness fell and we droned on. A lot of stars came out and I tapped the Irishman on the shoulder and asked, "Where is Mars, son?"

Evidently the planet's location was not hush-hush, because he pointed a finger and I saw it out there hanging balefully in space.

AS I STARED, a feeling of weird unreality arose within me. Could such things as space travel be even contemplated by one who wished to stay

within the realms of sanity? Then I hated the pinpoint of light sitting smugly there in the heavens—hated it for having sapped, hamstrung, and diverted a great man's mind. It had done that to Jim Sprague. It had caused him to waste what was probably the world's greatest talent upon grooming himself for a fool's errand. What he planned couldn't be done and I knew it as every sane man knew it. I visualized Jim, inside his cigar or ball, or whatever craft he'd devised, cracked up and dead in some Iowa wheat field.

We would land soon and I would find myself in a place surrounded by idiots; a community of addle-pated fanatics catering to the prize addle-pate of all. The boy who was going to Mars but who wouldn't hold a pan of water while someone smacked him on the butt with a paddle; who had called *that* absurd.

A short time later, we landed and I found I'd missed on the community of idiots business; that is unless the army is made up of fools. The moment I stepped from the plane I was in the hands of the military. There was brass all over the place. It was well lighted and I could discern quite a cluster of buildings grouped around an odd, great-domed structure that looked like some sort of temple.

I was driven to one of the outer buildings and ushered into a rather plainly furnished room and there was Jim's hand stuck out again.

My first impression was that he'd grown younger. There was gray at his hairline but the snapping black eyes were filled with an ageless vigor. They seemed tapped into some well of energy reserved for those chosen by the gods.

"On schedule?" I asked.

"On schedule," he replied. "Let's eat."

After dinner he got into it. "I had a hard time getting you here," he said. "The army is backing me and it's strictly QT. You'll have to sign a paper. They didn't want you and I had to pull the sulky child act and practically go on strike before they'd let me send that wire."

"What do I have to sign?"

"A damage waiver. Day after tomorrow at 5 A.M. this whole joint may go up in a puff that'll make the A-bomb look like a Fourth-of-July firecracker."

I felt a trifle chilly. I still couldn't believe it; still couldn't take it as a concrete fact. "Then you're really going to try for Mars."

"I'm going to make Mars—and back."

"But why not try something simple. Try the moon first. Divers cut their teeth on the low board before going up to the top."

"There's no life on the moon." He leaned forward, tense, and again I saw the kid I'd met that first time after he'd flunked the initiation. He tapped my knee with the same finger in the same spot. "I've quit hoping anyone will understand. I know I've got to prove it. And I know my variables can't be wrong."

"These variables of yours tell you exactly what? Do they tell you what the Mars-men look like—what their development is—what you'll find when you get there?"

The eyes clouded. "That's a hard question to answer unless you understand the tools I work with. At times I run into what I call a Theoretical Block. It held me up for years until I found out how to go around it; by a permissible adjustment of variables I can go around Theoretical Blocks and achieve an Ultimate Certainty."

"Then you don't know exactly what you'll find?"

"Not to a degree warranting description you'd understand. But I've satisfied myself."

"Look, Jim. In this whole crazy project is there anything you're sure of? Anything as certain as sunrise—as sure as taxes?"

"Quite a lot. Enough for me because my proven Ultimate Certainty makes a certainty also of what goes before."

"Can you slice that thin enough for a chump like myself to see through?"

"I think so. It's just this. I've proven my Ultimate Certainty which in plain words is this: I, James Sprague will arrive on the planet Mars. I, James Sprague, will return from the planet Mars. I, James Sprague, will bring back to earth absolute, uncontroversial proof that the planet Mars is inhabited. Does that make it clear?"

"I guess so. Who's going with you?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"No one."

"Now look here, son—"

He raised a hand. "I fought all that out with the army. I don't want to fight it out again with you. I conceived and built the ship to hold one man—me—and that's the way it is. Besides I'm tired now. Get the hell out of here and let me sleep."

THE NEXT morning I snooped around and found me some brass of sufficient importance and asked him some questions. "Since when does the army sponsor such crackpot projects as this?"

"You're mistaken. The army does not sponsor crackpot projects."

"Then you believe Jim's story about men on Mars and God knows what else?"

Here the officer hesitated, choosing his words. "The army is interested only to a certain point. We don't

know what is on Mars and we don't particularly care at the moment. We are inclined to be sympathetic to that point of view for only one reason."

"What's that?"

"The same brain which expounds the theory of an inhabited planet devised and built a conveyance which we are sure will take him to that planet and back again. Therefore we are inclined to go along with him. What we are mainly interested in however, is seeing that projected round trip become a reality."

"Oh."

"By the way. I have a release here for you to sign. You may use my pen."

I signed something—I don't know to this day what it was—and went to find Jim.

He was in excellent spirits. "Come on over to the hangar and I'll show you the ship. I'll explain what makes it go in terms even a saphead like you can understand."

"Save your breath," I moaned. "I don't care what makes it go. All I want to be sure of is that it *will* go—and that it'll come back."

He laughed and led me to the big building and got me through the guards.

It looked like a great shining teardrop, and yet not nearly as large as I'd expected. The door was open and as I stepped inside I got a mad unreasoning impression of being squeezed by a giant hand. It made me a little sick to even contemplate Jim flying through space, trapped in this glittering coffin. If anything missed fire—if any calculations were wrong...

He prattled on with his description as though he were talking about a late-model car. "Nothing is left to chance," he said. "I control the out-blast off both ends of the trip. The landings are automatic. This is because I might be unconscious or in-

capacitated in some other way. Five minutes after landing, the door opens automatically. This craft can do everything. Under certain circumstances it can practically think for itself. The out-blast, if necessary, can also be controlled from the outside. Every possible development has been provided for."

I didn't pay much attention to the inside of the big teardrop. There was a chair in the center of the cabin arranged on some peculiar springs—a big easy chair. There were a lot of drawers—some for supplies—others to house the stuff Jim planned to bring back with him—places for his precious "proof".

I got out of the ship as soon as I could and out of the hangar. I hated the whole project. I wished I was back in Egypt hunting old manuscripts. I wished to hell Jim Sprague had some sense.

I DIDN'T sleep at all the night before the big day. But I stayed away from Jim because I felt he needed all the rest he could get. About midnight I remembered a question I hadn't asked. I snooped around for fifteen minutes finding someone who had an answer for it.

"What's the estimated elapsed time on this jaunt anyhow? How long will Jim be gone—that is provided he isn't gone forever?"

"Approximately three months. I can check and give it to you closer."

"Never mind. That's close enough." I went back to my room. Three months of waiting and wondering. Then, when Jim didn't show up—as I knew he wouldn't—another interminable time before the brass officially gave up hope. Good God! I was sorry, then, I'd called on Jim that day after the initiation.

There was no letup in the rush and

bustle around the big hangar. It kept going all night. At four o'clock I gave in and went to the hangar. I cursed wholeheartedly to find Jim had been there all night. He grinned at me and offered me a cup of coffee. I scowled at him and took it.

Again I was overwhelmed by a sense of unreality. This was all too insane. Only the grim-faced, very real army men on scene gave it form and kept it from being strictly the stuff of dreams—or nightmares. I wasn't too much aware of what went on. There was a lot of apparently aimless rushing around and then Jim was in that chair. His eyes were live coals. I stood beside him while he finished with the technicians. Then the friends filed by. There were a lot of handshakes. I was the last one to leave the cabin. I shook his hand. He grinned.

"There's something I always wanted to ask you," he said.

"Ask away."

"Is it true your Old Man made his first bankroll selling police protection to broken-down prostitutes?"

"Certainly. What's wrong in that?"

"Not a thing. Get out of here now. I've got a date with a planet."

Everyone got way back. After swinging open the hangar lid so that the tear drop-pointed straight to heaven, the last technician came over and stood with us on a hill. No one spoke. We all stared silently at the black dome waiting for history to be made.

An official with a flashlight turned on the face of his watch called out: "Zero minus ten! Cover your eyes!"

I closed my eyes and prayed. But my prayer never got up to anybody of importance. It was knocked back down my throat by a whoosh and a roar. The blinding light seared through my eye lids. Then I had to look. I didn't care if I went blind afterward—just so I got one good look.

It was all the fireworks celebrations

in history rolled into one. A pin-point comet blasting up into the sky wearing a tail so broad and so fiery that the whole settlement—all the buildings—should have burned. They would have burned if they hadn't been fire proof. Then the tail died out and the tear drop was a bright star up among the dimming stars of the morning and I remembered a bright-eyed kid who'd told me long ago, "I'm going to Mars." He was on his way.

During the first twelve hours we got regular code reports from Jim. They were translated and posted on the bulletin board. I memorized each one as it came out. Then they stopped. He was beyond range.

Three months! Good Lord! Three months of waiting. On the first day I remembered a lot of things I'd forgotten to ask about. I hunted up one of the experts.

"When he comes back—if he comes back—how can he find this place again. If his aim from Mars is a thirty-second of an inch off he could miss the whole earth by a hundred thousand miles."

"His navigation from Mars is computed before out-blast from a standing start. That will bring him within range of us. When the ship gets inside range, we grab it. Our instruments are set to pull him right into the landing ramp. It's all automatic."

As I was turning away I thought of another question. "Who invented these superhuman instruments?"

"Jim Sprague."

"Thanks. I should have known that without asking."

I STUCK around three days. Then I went back to Europe thinking I could get some work done. That was silly. I got drunk pretty regularly. Finally I came back to the states and killed a couple of weeks in New York. I headed back for Arizona; then, the

last minute, kept on going and landed in Frisco. The time dragged just as slowly there.

I was back at the project two days before deadline hour—deadline minute the exact moment the pulsation should wing in out of space telling us Jim was back within range. They had four big clocks synchronized—big clocks on the wall like four eyes of blank doom ticking off seconds, flinging them into eternity.

The moment finally came as the big red hand moved around. The moment came and passed—nothing happened. An hour passed. Still nothing. Two hours—three. Grave faces. I looked at the grave faces and laughed to myself. The damn fools. The blasted damn dignified army brass. Had they actually thought he'd come back? Had they imagined for a moment he'd even get there? Four hours later I left the room of the idiotic clocks and went to my room where I had a bottle. I guess I fell asleep because some time later a shout awakened me.

"He's coming in! Inside range now! He's coming in!"

I dashed to the landing ramp and again was in a world of unreality. Up above—there in the sunset sky—was a metal tear drop with all those blessed instruments here on earth pulling it gently down into the landing ramp. It slid in. It came to rest.

I stood there crying like a fool. Good old tear drop! Beautiful sleek, gorgeous queen of the spaceways from

here to Mars. You came back you great big beautiful doll! And ten technicians with brains and no hearts leaped forward and began a cold-blooded examination of the hull.

Five minutes before the door would open. I lived ten years waiting those five minutes; waiting for an automatic something to click.

The door opened.

There isn't much more to tell. Jim Sprague was in the ship, but he was dead. He'd been dead quite a while there in the chair. He hadn't brought anything with him. Nothing in the cabin he hadn't out-blasted with. But his variables hadn't let him down. He'd proven that Mars is inhabited by a race as intelligent as we are—probably more so. A race that knows about space ships.

Yes. They're alive on Mars all right. The foul, black-hearted murdering devils! They cut his throat and did a lot of other things. They tied his ankles together with his own belt. They'd bound his hands together at the wrists with his own leather shoe laces so tight the cords cut in the bone. Then they'd put him in the chair, plotted the course and sent Jim and the tear drop back to us.

There's another project in the making. A second tear drop built for a bigger crew. I'm fighting like hell for a seat on same. And I don't know what baggage the others will be carrying. But me—I'm taking a good old-fashioned American tommy-gun.

COMING NEXT MONTH . . .

THE ILLUSION SEEKERS

By

P. F. Costello

A short novel based on one of the most astonishing conceptions ever to appear in Science-Fiction!

The METAL MARTYR

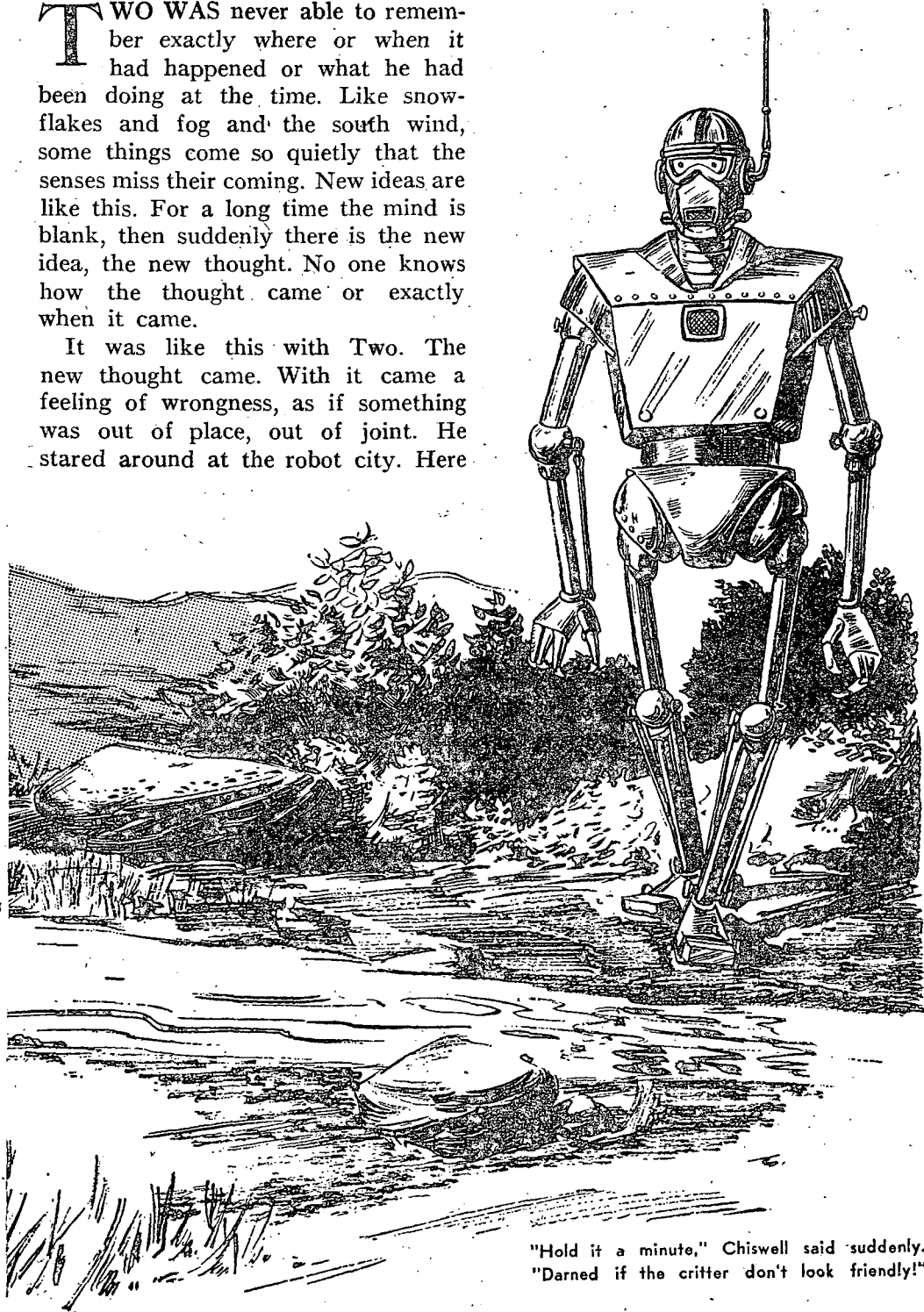
By Robert Moore Williams

**The time had come when mankind's lone
defender was a metallic figure named Two:
a robot suffering from a sore conscience!**



TWO WAS never able to remember exactly where or when it had happened or what he had been doing at the time. Like snowflakes and fog and the south wind, some things come so quietly that the senses miss their coming. New ideas are like this. For a long time the mind is blank, then suddenly there is the new idea, the new thought. No one knows how the thought came or exactly when it came.

It was like this with Two. The new thought came. With it came a feeling of wrongness, as if something was out of place, out of joint. He stared around at the robot city. Here



"Hold it a minute," Chiswell said suddenly.
"Darned if the critter don't look friendly!"

in this small cluster of stone buildings set among low hills with the high mountains forming a backdrop in the distance, he had been created and had lived all his life. To him, it was home. He knew no other existence. But now, with this new idea strong and vigorous in him, this existence was alien, this place was not home. He belonged somewhere else. All robots belonged somewhere else. With the sense of wrongness strong within him, he went immediately to the Master Technician.

"I am not a robot," Two stated. "I am a man." This was a new thought, this was his new idea.

The Master Technician sighed. His number and his name was Eight. He was in charge of all robot activity. There were seventy-nine all-purpose robots. There had always been that many, there would always be this many. This was one of their laws, no one knew why. If a robot was damaged beyond repair, if the insidious disease, rust, ate away vital parts, if the other grim disease, green corrosion, crept into the electronic brain, spreading slow but certain destruction with it, the ailing robot was destroyed and another was constructed to take his place and his number. It was one of the duties of the Master Technician to determine when this was necessary.

Looking at Two, the Master Technician knew instantly what was wrong. Two was delusional. Something had happened inside his brain, some minute change had occurred, some electronic synapse had taken place where no synapse was supposed to occur, with the result that Two thought he was something else. Robots rarely became delusional. The brain substance, constructed according to the ancient pattern, held firmly to its rutted pathways. But occasionally something went wrong, as it had gone wrong now.

Well, perhaps something might be done to correct this odd delusion. If not—

"Look at yourself and see what you are," the Master Technician said.

Obediently Two looked at himself. Reaching down to the stone floor of the Master Technician laboratory, he saw two sturdy legs covered with a tough, rubbery plastic that was impervious to water and to most acids, legs cleverly constructed and jointed so that he could walk or run, or even dance, if the impulse struck him. Legs he had, because legs could walk where wheels could not run and wings could not fly; arms he had, with jointed fingers to hold tools. He had two eyes and two ears, because seeing and hearing were necessary to him, but no nose and no mouth, because he did not breathe oxygen or eat food. Small but very powerful long-lasting batteries supplied his energy. He was equipped with a high-frequency, compact radio for communication over short distances. Housed in his head was the brain substance, which directed all his activities.

"My body resembles that of a man," Two stated, after looking. He had seen a man, once, in the mountains, and he knew how they looked. True, he had only had a glimpse of the strange creature fleeing in wild fright, but a glimpse was all he had needed.

"What of it?" the Master Technician answered, irritated. "You are an all-purpose robot. Man is an all-purpose animal. Two forms which serve the same purpose will probably resemble each other, at least outwardly. That is logic."

TWO SHIFTED his weight from one foot to the other. No robot ever sat down to rest, there was no need for it. He and the Master Tech-

nician were standing. There was logic in the Master Technician's statement. But—

His thinking was perturbed. About him somewhere was a feeling of failure, as if something had gone wrong, some experiment had failed, some assigned task had been neglected.

"I know I look like a robot," he said. "But I am a man."

"Why are you a man?" The Master Technician demanded. He was becoming impatient. "What makes you a man?"

"I feel I am," Two answered.

"You feel you are!" Robots were creatures of logic, they followed the rules of sine and the cosine, the laws of chemistry, of electricity, or weight, pressure, and of force. "There is no such thing as feeling!"

"I know," Two said. "But—"

"Get this delusion out of your mind," the Master Technician said. "Or we will have to disassociate you."

Disassociation meant that the body was dismantled and the brain case removed, after which the brain case was dissolved in acid. Two was silent. Whether it could happen or not, there was a new feeling in him now—rebellion. It rose as a small murky cloud of anger in the back of his mind. "Then let it be that way," he said.

"What?" The Master Technician's photo-electric eyes came as close to registering amazement as was possible for such orbs.

"And to hell with you," Two said. Balling his hand into a fist, he punched the Master Technician in the eye.

The Master Technician fell over backward. He was too surprised to do anything else, though later other courses of action would occur to him. Two did not intend to be around then. He ran. His intention was fully formed in his own mind.

He was a man. Like seeks like. He was going to his own kind, to men.

There were not many men, he knew. Perhaps, like the robots, their numbers were restricted to seventy-nine. They lived in the mountains to the west. The robots did not seek them out and they did not seek out the robots. Between them there was a sort of armed neutrality and each pretended the other did not exist.

"I will go to my own kind," Two thought. "They will accept me for what I am."

All day long the sturdy little metal figure trudged westward, following his delusion. He crossed rivers, he climbed hills, he found his way through forests where the trees grew tall and thick. The gray wolves of this land sniffed at his heels. He ignored them. The great cats sleeping on the rocky ledges looked down at him as he passed, their ears flattening against their heads. He did not see them. He was seeking man. He came to a high tableland and climbed over piles of rubble that had once been a city a thousand—or was it ten thousand years ago—and to him the piles of rubble were only obstacles in his path. When night came, he turned on the powerful light placed in his forehead and continued the search. In the middle of the third day, he found—man.

FROM THE top of a hill he saw them in a little valley below, two men, clad in deerskins. They were standing beside a little river. In their hands they carried strange objects of bent wood. He moved toward them. They saw him as soon as he came in sight. Instantly they grasped the strange objects in their left hands.

"What the hell is that thing?" Bill Argo asked.

"I don't know," Ed Chiswell answered. "I saw one of them once but I

didn't stick around to find out what it was."

"Let's get out of here," Argo said.

"No. Wait," Chiswell protested. "It wants to talk to us."

Their bows ready, the arrows on the string, they waited doubtfully. At the sight of Two, uneasiness moved in them as if each remembered an ancient enemy. As Two came closer and closer and they saw all too clearly his strangeness, the uneasiness grew in them. Suddenly Argo drew the bowstring to his ear and released the arrow.

The shaft struck Two a glancing blow on his metal chest and bounced off harmlessly.

"Get out of here!" Argo shouted, and ran.

Ed Chiswell stood his ground. Men ran from the great wolves, from the bears, from the cats, men ran from the thunder and the lightning. But he was tired of running. Here, in this creature coming toward him, was something new, something different. Any new thing would be an improvement over the life he knew now, he thought.

Two hardly knew the arrow had struck him. He did not grasp its purpose. The delight at meeting his own kind was a feeling of great joy in him. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," Chiswell said. Fear was in him, but he stood his ground. What was this black creature that looked and walked and talked like a man? "What are you? Where did you come from?"

"I am a man," Two answered. "I came from back there." The wave of his hand indicated the foothills to the east.

"You are a—" Chiswell caught himself. He saw instantly that this strange creature was suffering from some form of hallucination. Men sometimes imagined they were something else. This

black creature imagined it was a man. Chiswell began to ask questions. What was his name? Where did he live? Were there others like him? Two answered readily and eagerly. From his answers, Chiswell got a clear picture of the robot city and the robot way of life. A feeling of tremendous mystery rose in him. What was the origin of these creatures? For that matter, what was the origin of man?

Unlike most of his fellows, who had little time left over from the grim business of finding enough to eat to waste any of it in wondering about such remote problems as origins, Chiswell found time to wonder and to think. Here was a new problem. He sensed that it fringed a great mystery. "Will you come back to the tribe and live with me?" he said.

"Of course. That is what I want most." Two was almost pathetically grateful. He had been accepted as a man!

"Will your fellows search for you?" Chiswell asked. It was an important question. Not knowing what powers might be housed in Two's metal body, he wanted to take no chances of leading robots to the hiding place of the tribe.

"My fellows?" Two was hurt. He saw that he had not really been accepted as a man, that this man was humoring him, perhaps for purposes of his own.

"Sorry," Chiswell instantly apologized. "I meant, will the robots search for you?" He intended to take no chances of losing, or angering, this creature. Two knew many things that might be of tremendous value to the tribe. The robot bodies were made of metal. This meant they either had access to a supply of the hard-to-find ore or they knew some other secret for finding it. The tribe needed metal desperately. In fact, they were begin-

ning to use stone again, simply because they could not find metal. If Two could teach them this one secret, any danger they might run in befriending him would be worth the risk.

"Let them search," Two said. "They will never find me." He felt a little better.

"Come with me," Chiswell said.

They went up the mountain together.

TWO HAD found man and man had accepted him as a friend. But it was something of a shock to him to realize that man went clothed in the skins of animals, that he carried a device of bent wood with which to kill other animals, and that this man, somehow, was afraid. Although he knew little about men, in the depths of his mind he had always thought of them as being giants, great creatures who ranged the earth unafraid, taller than mountains, greater than gods. Again he was shocked, this time at himself, to find himself thinking of gods. Robots had no gods. But men have them, he thought defensively. And I am a man.

"Here is where we live," Chiswell said. He pointed to a small hole at the base of a high cliff, moved toward it. Men lounged around the entrance. One of them rose to his feet and shouted. It was Argo.

"Wait here," Chiswell said. "I will talk to them."

From a distance, Two watched the conference take place. Angry voices rose, shouting that Two could not enter the cavern, that Chiswell was a traitor who had brought danger to the tribe. Chiswell was patient. He kept urging some course of action, kept pointing toward the waiting robot. Little by little the anger died out on the faces of the men. "Go talk to him,"

Chiswell urged. "See for yourself that he is harmless."

The men came forward reluctantly. Two answered their questions with patience. They did not understand him. Nor did they trust him. But Chiswell's patient urging won grudging acceptance for him. They admitted him to the cavern. As they passed the entrance, four men immediately rolled a huge stone into place, blocking the exit.

"We do that to keep out the wolves and the bears at night," Chiswell explained.

The cavern was a vast, single room. Fires gleamed dully around the walls and the air was heavy with smoke. Inside the cavern were other men, some of them the strange kind of men called women, and little ones called children. Reassured by Chiswell, they clustered around Two, their voices rising like the chattering of birds.

"Who are you?"

"Where did you come from?"

"What are you?"

"I am a man," Two said with dignity.

They didn't dispute him but a child laughed uneasily, and the group drew back from him. "Inside I am a man," Two repeated.

"Inside or outside, what difference does it make?" Chiswell said. He went quietly from person to person, whispering. The group was uneasy. They were men. Two was—something else. The question was—what?

He sensed their uneasiness. What if they were tricking him? What did he know about men, after all? He looked toward the entrance as a sudden thought moved in him but the big stone blocked the exit. He could pull it aside perhaps, but—

A voice rose. "He's made of metal. I say we cut him up and use the metal for knives." Argo's voice.

"No!" Chiswell shouted. "Shut up, you fool. No, Two! He doesn't mean it. I won't let him do it. Argo, you hopeless fool! Two, stop!"

TWO WAS running. He had heard what they intended to do with him. Perhaps Chiswell did not wish to do this thing to him, but Chiswell was one and the others were many and they could brush Chiswell aside and pull him down. Panic moved in him and he ran.

He did not run toward the exit. The guards and the stone were there. He ran blindly across the cavern, turning on the light on his forehead to mark the way. The bright beam flashed out, revealing a dark opening across the cave. Feet pounded behind him, voices shouted. He turned his head and the bright beam of his light flashed into the eyes of the men, blinding and frightening them. They had never seen a light like this. The only light they knew came from the sun, the moon, and the fires that burned continuously in this cave. They shrank away from the light. Two ran on, unpursued.

In his mind was turmoil. Men were creatures of dark treachery, black liars, and false friends. The tunnel closed around him. When no pursuit sounded behind him, the panic in his mind began to die down. "Men!" he thought. "I must get away from this place. I must go back to the Master Technician and confess my error." His mind had been jarred back to normal channels. He was a robot again.

He did not know how big this cave was but somewhere there must be another exit, he felt. The tunnel turned, then moved ahead again, arrow straight. The straightness of the walls caught his eye and he realized that this was not a natural cave. "Perhaps this was once a mine," he thought.

"Perhaps, when the ore was exhausted, they abandoned the mine."

Metal was precious to robots too. Their city was located over a source of raw iron ore. They had mines in the mountains to the far south, where they dug copper, lead, and other metals. But all metals were very hard to find. Sometimes they found huge excavations from which all the ore had been taken, like this one. They assumed that their ancestors had dug these mines. They were vague about time. If a thing happened yesterday, or last year, it was the same time to them.

Two was certain men had not dug this tunnel. How could men dig anything?

The tunnel opened into a round chamber. Here the roof had caved in, marking the end of the passage. Or so it had been for men. Tracks in the thick dust revealed that men had been this far, though not recently. Where men had been stopped, two went on. Logically, there had to be a tunnel out of this chamber. He dug down through the fallen rock until he found it. Feeling completely safe from pursuit, he went on. In an alcove off the main tunnel, something caught his eye.

"A machine!" he thought.

He, and all robots, felt a sort of kinship with all machinery. Machines fascinated them. He stopped to study this one. Even though its parts were pitted and falling away into fragments of rusted, diseased metal, its essential function was clear. "It's an air purifier," he thought. "But—"

Although this was certainly an air purifier, robots, having no need for air, could not have built this machine. Who, then, had built it?

In his mind, Two felt a sudden dizziness. A machine to purify air had no reason to exist. But here was one.

It had been constructed in some yesterday that his mind could not fathom and it had sat here and rusted away with disease for—how long?

Traced in the dust beside the machine was an outline, a pattern of slightly raised ridges which, at first glance, was almost as mystifying as the machine. Poking into the ridges, Two found a fragment of bone and realized the nature of this pattern.

It was the skeleton of a man, perhaps a man who had once tended this air-conditioning machine and who had died beside it.

A dead man beside a dead machine! Two could not believe what he saw. "Perhaps the man came here long after the machine ceased functioning, before the roof fell in the round chamber—" he thought. It was a possible solution but it did not satisfy him.

"But men know nothing of machines," he thought. The feeling of mystery rose in him. He rose to his feet, moved down the tunnel. There were other machines!

There was a huge room full of them! Machines for transforming electricity, the vast hooded bulk of a machine for converting heat energy into electrical energy— And skeletons!

But nowhere was there the rusted body of a robot. Nowhere was there any sign that robots had even been here!

"Men could not have created these machines!" Two thought. "They could not!"

HE CONTINUED exploring. There was a huge room, the walls lined with shelves, and the shelves filled with books.

All robots were conditioned to read. It was a part of their training, and though they had little use for reading, they continued the training as they continued everything else, by rote.

On a metal table in the center of the room was a thick volume. On the floor beside the corroded table was a skeleton. A book and a man who had read it, perhaps a man who had written it.

Two brushed the dust from the book. The pages were a plastic that would last an eternity. Perhaps this book had already lasted an eternity while it waited for someone to come along and read what was written on its pages. Two read the words.

He stood transfixed. Here was the history of this cavern and of the race that had built it and here, too, was the history of the robots.

Men had come before robots! The thought dazed him. The robots had told each other that they had always existed. This solution had satisfied them. But it was not a true solution. Here in this book was proof that men had created robots, that they owed the debt of life itself to men.

"Not such men as those!" He was thinking of the men near the exit of the cavern, of Argo, and of Chiswell, and the others. They knew nothing of robots, certainly they did not have the knowledge to create them.

The book had the answer to this problem too. Other men had created the robots in the days of man's glory when he had walked as a giant across the earth, his head taller than the mountains. In those days he had mastered every science, he had known all knowledge. Or almost all knowledge. The book told of the knowledge man had lacked.

He had not known how to control pestilence, famine, flood, war, drought; most of all he had not known how to control the slow wasting away of natural resources in minerals and soils until not enough of either was left to maintain the civilization he had created.

Two saw now that the ancient mines the robots occasionally found had been dug not by robots but by men, searching out the last scrap of ore on the planet.

Nor had man known how to control himself. When the time came that there was not enough for all, war to the death had begun, over the remaining minerals and lands, over something for his belly, shelter for his head. Then—pestilence again. A new disease had arisen, an insidious germ that broke the hearts of the doctors, that evaded the anti-biotics, that swept like fire from group to group.

"Here in this cavern we conquered that virus," the ancient man had written. "Less than a hundred of us were left when we isolated the germ and learned to control it. Then—fate played its last trick on us."

What new plague had come, Two wondered, what new stroke of ill luck had risen to strike down the last remnants of a race? The book had the answer.

"Our robots deserted us," the words said. "They ran and repaired the machines in this cavern, each doing the work of twenty men. Through some defect in the brain substance one robot got the idea they should be free. They left us when we needed them most, when at last a new hope of life was opening before us.

"Cursed be the word Robot. Let this be a warning to all generations to come, if such there be. If they had remained faithful, we would have survived, but with their desertion comes the end of man. Cursed be their name forever and forever!"

THERE the writing ended. Two stood silent. Here was the story of the origin of the robots and here too was the story of a monstrous treachery. Somehow, somewhere, the

basic factor of loyalty to man had been left out of one robot, with the result that the group had deserted.

In Two there moved a new feeling, one he had never known—the feeling of shame. His kind had been unfaithful, in his hour of desperate need they had deserted their creator. What had happened after that, he did not know. Probably the deserting robots had hid all memory of their defection from themselves and when they found ore and began to fabricate new robots to replace the ones who wore out, they did not include a knowledge of their treachery in the conditioning of the new brains.

Nor would they be willing to accept their villany now. He could hear the Master Technician voice rise with outraged indignation if this book was brought to his attention.

"Lies, distortions, untruths!" the Master Technician would say. "Disassociate him."

"But men still exist," Two thought. "I have seen them. This book is wrong."

The book was not wrong and he knew it. The men who still existed were the descendents of the group that had lived here in this cavern. Or perhaps they were the descendents of other small groups that had survived the virus.

Obviously, for generations men had followed a difficult trail. Perhaps on his way down from civilization, he had retraced all the forward steps he had once taken, and had become again, as he once was, a few scattered roaming families who had forgotten their history and their origin. The men up in front did not even know that this cavern existed.

Men had slept away the generations, but while they slept something had happened. Raped Earth had renewed herself, the forest had grown tall

again, the meadows were green, the water flowed clear and sweet in the many streams. True, the metals were gone forever, but Earth herself was again ready for new life.

"They could use plastics," Two thought. "If they knew how—"

He knew, then, what he was going to do.

THE MIDDLE of the night had passed when Two returned to the cavern. His shouts awakened the sleeping men. "Come here!" he called. "Come and learn your history."

At first, they thought they were being attacked. Bows were hastily strung, clubs grasped. The women and the children ran for cover.

Ed Chiswell raged among the men, telling them not to be fools again. "Listen to what he has to say," he ordered. They listened.

First, Two told them what he had discovered. They turned awed glances in the direction from which he had come, curious glances, wondering looks. Then he showed them the books. "Come close to me," he said.

All the rest of the night, he labored with them. At first, what he wanted was difficult for them to grasp. They had forgotten reading, they had forgotten everything. He was patient. The women and the children came out of hiding. Little by little they began to grasp the idea that something of importance was concealed in the strange marks of these odd things he called books. Chiswell sweated hard trying to understand but the children got the idea first. There was one nine-year-old boy whose eyes were alive with eager apprehension.

By the time the first false lights of dawn were in the sky outside, a dozen of them had the idea. True, they could not read yet, but they had sensed the importance of this strange magic. Two

had the feeling that they would never give up until they had solved the problem of the books. Especially the nine-year-old boy would not give up, nor Chiswell. His task somehow was made easier by a strange phenomenon that he did not try to understand, the fact that something in these people seemed almost to remember the meaning of writing, and the importance of it. They were learning a new thing but they learned it in the manner of men who are not learning, but are remembering a fact known long before.

A shout came from the guards at the entrance.

"There are robots outside, searching."

The cavern was instantly quiet. Argo's eyes fastened on Two and a hard look came into them. "If you have betrayed us—"

"Shut up!" Chiswell said. "What does this mean, Two?"

Two rose to his feet. "It means I must be going," he said.

"To betray us?"

"No. To save you. And to pay a debt."

At the entrance he moved the stone aside. "Replace the stone after me and stay in the cavern until all is safe outside for you to come out," he said.

"But wait—" Chiswell said.

"Goodbye," Two answered.

He moved down the hill.

The searching robots found him, took him.

IN HIS laboratory the Master Technician was waiting. "Well, Robot Two?" he challenged.

"I am a man," Two answered.

There was pride in the way he spoke, pride in the way he lifted himself to his full height, as if here and now an ancient debt was being repaid, an ancient slate wiped clean.

"I am a man," he repeated. "Some day you will answer to my sons for what you do to me here."

It was lunacy, of course, but as the acid bath closed over the brain case, blotting out the identity of Two, the last thought in his mind was of that day in the future when the men in the cavern would emerge again, armed

with an old knowledge, perhaps not seeking vengeance but certainly seeking their place in the sun. That would be a great day, worth dying for, when his sons came out again into the light of the sun, to stride again like giants across the surface of the earth, their heads taller than mountains.

THE END

TOMORROW'S HERO

By
JON BARRY

HE SHIFTED the weight of the rifle higher on his shoulder. The chill Mongolian wind swept in vicious gusts across the plain, but he didn't notice it. Beneath his armpits he could feel the cold sweat of icy nervousness trickling down his sides.

He walked slowly and in the half-light of dawn the monstrous picture was clearly outlined before his eyes. As far as he could see the flat plain, dotted with blocks of concrete, was a forest of ninety foot cylinders. High in the air they towered, waiting like the insentient machine they were until the pulses should energize their rockets and send them hurtling across the vast gulf of space and time that separated Asia from the Americas.

Private Drugagovich walked his beat slowly and his eyes were like twin swords as his racing heart and brain told him that this was the time. For Private Drugagovich might have been identified as Jerry Brannon, OSS agent extraordinary. The little dot of dye beneath a fingernail of his left hand could fluoresce and identify him under the right conditions.

Drugagovich-Brannon cursed softly in the Slavic tongue now as native to him as his own—after these last three years. For on this Mongolian plain, the fate of a world was to be decided—and that lay directly in his hands.

Brannon stopped near one of the atomic-headed war-rockets. He dropped his rifle knowing that the half-dark concealed his action, grubbed in his capacious pockets and his hands emerged with a small metal box. With one swift motion he placed the box near the base of the rocket and touched a switch. Near four rockets he repeated this strange action.

Every move he made was confident and knowing. The fruits of three months of practice were beginning to tell. Brannon picked up his rifle and started to walk swiftly toward the small airfield a quarter of a mile away.

Yes, he thought, there they were, four jets standing on the field. He glanced at his watch. In three minutes the mechanics would start their engines and in another

five, the patrol pilots would come out of the operations office, and take off. Oh, but they wouldn't this time, Jerry thought ironically.

He reached the limit of the field and started toward the nearest jet. Even as he expected, the sentry called halt. "It is not permitted," he shouted, "step back or I'll call the officer of the guard." Almost without noticing, Jerry shot him twice. The man's face glazed with surprise and he tumbled to the ground.

In seconds, Jerry was in the cockpit of the Commie jet. Its motor was hissing smoothly and memory and study had made its plan as familiar as his face.

The non-com mechanic stepped to the side of the plane and saw the unfamiliar face and uniform. He started to protest. Jerry did not even look. The canopy shot close and he touched the throttle. With a violent *whoosh* the jet was air-borne in minutes.

Jerry glanced into the sky. It would be only minutes—perhaps already—before the incoming patrol jets would be alerted. Holding the ground near to him, Jerry opened wide the throttle of the jet and let her roar. He had approximately fifteen minutes in which to get out of the vicinity and he had no intention of staying around. By now, he knew the rockets were as good as gone. While he had fused four of them with his little bomb, the entire lot of hundreds would go.

Still hugging the ground Jerry let the jet have her nose. He knew where he was going and how he was going to be picked up by Intelligence.

The minutes passed and then suddenly the sky behind the plane became lit with a rosy red as if a new sun had risen in the west. Then Jerry slumped in the seat. He had succeeded.

And behind him four hundred and eleven atomic bomb-headed war-rockets went off almost simultaneously, leaving nothing on the face of that section of the Earth save a gigantic scar...

Thank God, breathed Jerry, there won't be war for a long time to come. I've scotched their firebrand...

THE OPERATIONAL THINKERS

By
H. R. STANTON

SOMEWHERE, somewhere in the labyrinthine halls of the military and naval command offices of the United States—and other countries—a small group of highly skilled, abstract thinkers, is seated about a table. This group is engaged in a peculiar occupation. It is studying the past to learn about the future!

Off hand this doesn't seem like a particularly profitable operation. We learn from our mistakes, the copybooks say; but the ghosts of things long dead are gone, too. So what should the past have to do with the future.

The answer is, a lot.

This strange system of study has penetrated to all the military minds of the world—as well as those in business—because it happens to work. Actually the subject is called “operational research” and it is the application of a branch of statistics to everyday realistic problems.

It came out of the Second World War and was conceived sometime during the battle of Britain. It is now well-established and no nation can afford to engage in a major conflict without giving operational research a thorough consideration. It is predicated on the belief that a study of what has happened, a past series of events, will tell us a great deal about what is to happen. But it is not idle prediction, prognostication or guessing. It is based on cold hard fact, and fact alone.

Here is the sort of problem it attempts to answer. Suppose you have before you a list telling how all attacking aircraft

which have strafed your city, have been dealt with. How many were shot down, where they were shot down, how many shells were fired, how your anti-aircraft weapons reacted, and a host of similar data. By a study of such data could you improve your defenses? The answer is—you certainly could!

Another case: you know how many subs you've sunk and under what conditions—with all the details. By studying carefully that data, by considering a complex series of factors, you can calculate that it is likely that if you do such-and-such a thing (like arming your planes with heavier rockets or increasing their speed by five percent) you will sink a larger percentage, probably.

What's so amazing about that? A great deal, for until now it is shocking how little cold-blooded thinking has gone into such matters. This science of operational research only uses paper and pencils, data and calculating machines—and brains—but it produces results all out of proportion to the effort spent.

The whole subject isn't so far removed from insurance statistics, or accident death-rates, but its applications are limitless. Naturally this doesn't mean that you can win a war by simply studying what happened in your last one, but it does mean that men, by the intelligent interpretation of statistics, can analyze the potential future in terms of the past. Put away the crystal ball, Jack, here comes O.R.!

IT'S ALL A GAMBLE!

By
LEE OWENS

YOU MIGHT not think that there's any relationship between such diametrically opposed subjects as gambling and science. If anything you'd be inclined to say that one is the exact antithesis of the other. But you'd be wrong.

For much of modern science—all that's really basically new—is directly related to the toss of a dice, to the green-covered craps or roulette tables, or the friendly hand of poker you played last night.

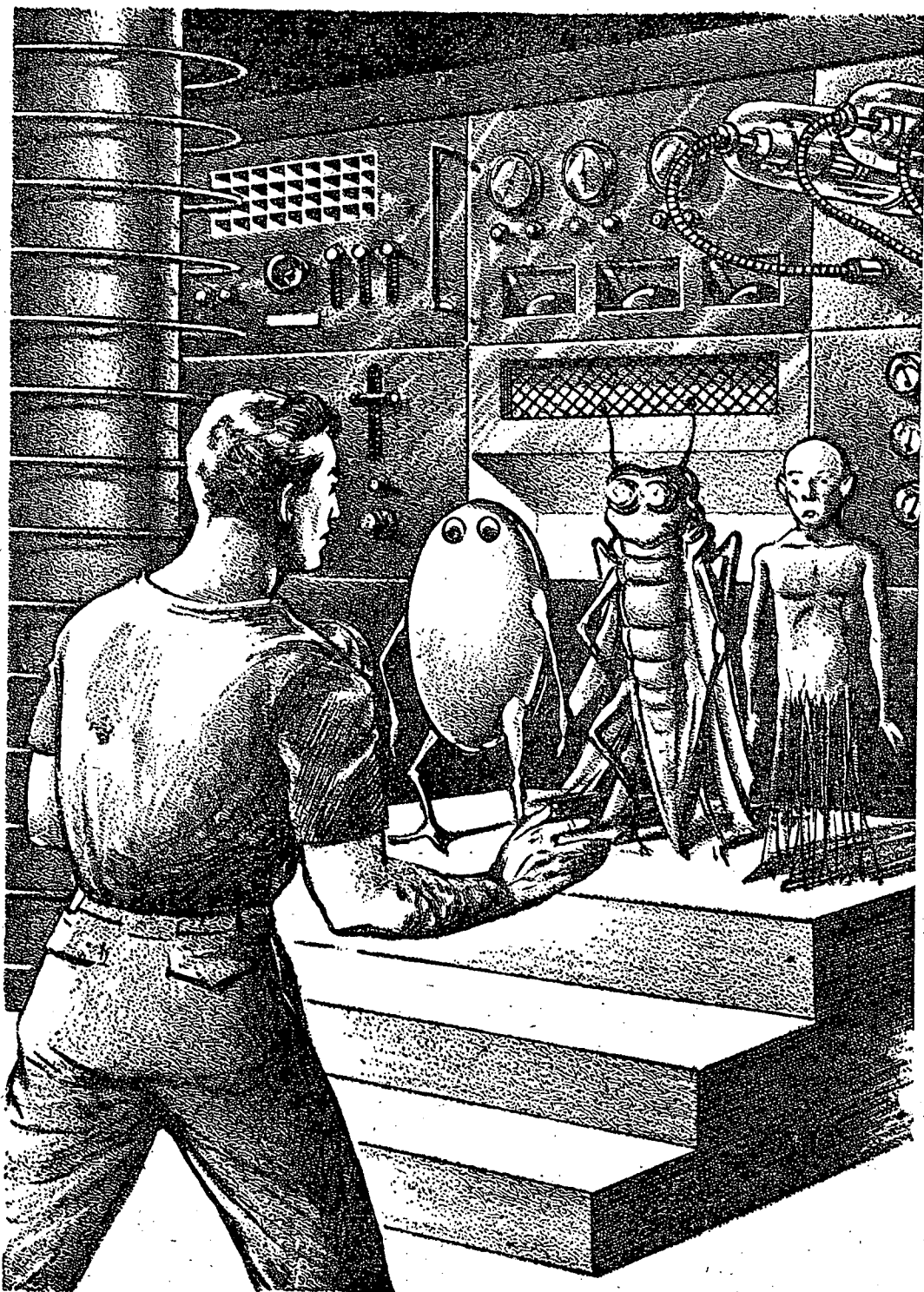
In fact, the science of probability, that branch of mathematics about which we're talking stems directly from a request by gamblers, of eminent scientists like Laplace and Pascal, to supply them with information about chance and probability. The scientists set to work, ground out the answers, but didn't bother to look into the implications of their work.

Then along came atomic physics, biology and statistics, and probability came into its own. Now the great majority of work in modern science is linked one way or another with the study of probability.

For example, consider the electron. If you've done any work in radio or TV or have read in popular science, you might have the impression that an electron is a very definite thing, something like a tiny marble, which goes hurtling around inside vacuum tubes, but that isn't the case at all. We have absolutely no physical picture of the electron at all. The nearest we can come to describing it is to go to the science of probability which tells us that it is something like a little cloud of gas whose density is proportional to the chances of an electron being in that vicinity!

So chance, with all its ramifications hinging upon the turn of a card or the throw of a dice, enters into the laboratory and provides answers that just wouldn't be, without it. Unwittingly a group of gamblers, in their way, might be said to have laid the foundation for all modern science. You can be sure that any future developments are going to have a lot to do with this tricky subject!

* * *



- "Greetings, Earthman," said the one on the right. "Where do I find the bathroom?"



"ALL YOU DO IS TRANZ the FRAMMIS!"

By
Seldon Walters

Three of them dropped in — all from different planets. There was just no way to get rid of them, either . . . until Thwaites decided to do some "tranzing".

ROGER THWAITES came unto the land of New Mexico in the middle of the Twentieth Century, and he brought with him Genevieve, his spouse, and Peter, his only son. He brought also his record changer and his new fishtail sedan. He had his refrigerator shipped.

He came from the City of the Angels, eight hundred miles to the west. There were no angels in the City of the Angels in this time, and it

was filled with sharpers and phonies and sooth-sayers and one thing and another, and the once balmy climate was under a wrothful cloud called by the inhabitants smog.

The Thwaites looked upon the clear, big land of New Mexico and Roger said unto Genevieve, "This is the spot, honey."

Peter, who was six, said, "Where are the cowboys?"

"Mas alla," said Genevieve, who

had been studying Spanish.

They rented a 'dobe jacal in the village of Taos high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The fishtail sedan was almost bigger than the jacal. But there was a shed outside that would be big enough for a workshop and lab, and that was the important thing.

Strange heavy boxes came in the first few weeks, and Roger piled them by the shed, opened them one by one, and when they had all finally come he plunged into his work.

At noon and at supper time Genevieve would go to the little shed and call Roger. She would usually say, "How's it coming, dear?" And Roger would say "Great" or "Rotten", all according to how it was.

In the evenings they would discuss the project, and also their glorious exile. They'd saved sensibly, and Roger had done well in the City of Angels as a consulting engineer for radio and television. He had a few royalties coming in from patents. Just the same Genevieve would warn that the project would have to be finished in six months or so, if things were going to come out even. Roger would wave his long fingers and smile and say there was nothing to worry about. . . .

One day, when about three months had passed, Peter came into the laboratory. He had by now acquired levis and cowboy boots and a large Roy Rogers hat. He said, "Hi, Daddy."

Roger blew on some smoking solder and said, "Hi."

"Estevan Garcia says you don't go to work like his Daddy does," said Peter.

"Uh huh," said Roger.

"Estevan Garcia says his Daddy says you are *un chincualudo*."

"And what's *un chincualudo*?"

"A bum," said Peter.

Roger sighed, put down the soldered connection, laid the hot iron aside and squatted to Peter's level. "Now, look,"

he said, "you can tell Estevan Garcia, or whatever his name is, that your Daddy works harder than any six men he ever heard of. And that he's a sort of a genius on top of it. Look—look at all this." He swept his hand at the cluttered lab. The thing that had been a shack, and before that a lambing pen. On one wall now stood a bench, a lathe, a drill press. On the other wall a long table with bus bars, test sockets and racks of parts. Everything from cathode ray tubes to boxes of graphite resistors.

AND IN BACK of the shop stood It. Big and gleaming, It was, with a swiveling basket antenna activated by thyatron tubes and thrusting up through the roof.

"Serious business, all of it," said Roger shaking his finger at the boy. "It will revolutionize things. It will take the trucks off the highways and the ships off the sea, and the airplanes out of the air, and it will enable man to go anywhere in space—and come back."

Peter's under lip trembled.

"Now what's the matter?"

"I don't want the trucks to go away."

"Go back to the house," said Roger disgustedly, "and let Mother straighten it all out."

He sent Peter away, patting him fondly. Then he turned back to his work and a moment later had forgotten Peter. And Genevieve and the record changer and the fishtail sedan and in fact the whole world, for his thoughts and his machine, too, were directed toward space.

The first real test today.

He turned on the current; he tuned carefully and made a dozen settings. He listened to the hum and watched the little platform under the rotating antenna.

Presently something glowed on the

platform. Odd-shaped little rocks began to appear.

Roger held his breath. He was fond of science stories where this sort of thing—and more—happened all the time. But this was real. It meant that his theory was sound, his device would work. It was a matter of degree now; more refinements and better engineering would bring more than just a few rocks across space....

After supper, when Roger was in bed in his little room under the portales Roger and Genevieve examined the little rocks together. "Nickel, iron toungesten," said Roger. "Same as meteorites. A few hours ago they were particles whirling around the sun somewhere between Mars and Jupiter. They're tiny, but they are in effect asteroids. Other planets, small as they are. And I've brought 'em here."

"You're wonderful, dear," said Genevieve. But she often said that and it had lost its punch.

"I didn't dare use full power." He went on as though he hadn't heard her. "This was done with a mere forty watts. You can imagine the possibilities if I used even a normal load. This is greater than atomic energy! Vessels—vehicles—space ships—can be sent from station to station—"

"It might speed up package deliveries at that," said Genevieve.

He threw his hands to the air. "Package deliveries! Here I am on the verge of the greatest thing in science since the wheel—"

She smiled and patted his hand. "Temper, dear. Remember—you promised if we ever got to a nice quiet place where all your drunken friends and in-laws like Aunt Hattie couldn't find us, you'd control your temper."

"Okay," grunted Roger, "It's controlled."

There was a noise outside. Sounded like someone running across the walk

under the portales. Near the door to Peter's room.

"What the devil was that?" Roger got up and went to the door. It was quiet outside; there was the big, clear, blue-black sky and there were the diamond stars. He looked into the lab. Nobody there. He came back. He saw that the door to Peter's bedroom was open and he closed it. He came in again. "You shouldn't leave Peter's door open all the way. It gets cold at night in this altitude."

Genevieve said, "That's funny, I could have sworn I closed it."

"Well, never mind," said Roger sitting down again. "Let's start that report on my experiments. You can help me put it into English instead of Sciencese."

They worked far into the night. They loved it: it was more like old times when they'd first been married and worked together alone, uninterrupted. No visitors—too far away from everything, this place. At two a.m. they were tired but happy and they went to bed.

ROGER got up earliest the next morning. Habit from his Navy days. He took a shower, bumbled into pants and T shirt, took an egg from the refrigerator, fried it, gulped it, and then went out to the laboratory.

He opened the door of the shack. Immediately he knew something was wrong. There was the hum—too much of it. It was warm; things overheating. His eyes blinked to the gloom and he saw three intruders on the little platform below the antenna. But his first thought was for his equipment: he cut switches, he pulled rheostats down, he unmeshed condensers—somebody had been fooling with everything.

Then he turned to the three intruders. He said, "What the devil do you think you're doing in here?"

They stirred a little, but none answered.

Roger's eyes were adjusting better to the gloom. As he began to make out the shapes—the features—of these three things on the platform his mouth began to open. He had to adjust his mind, then, to the look of them. Three—*things*...there on the platform... was he still asleep and dreaming?

"Who—what are you?" said Roger.

"You are what—who?" said a voice—a voice much like his own.

"What? What's that?" Roger stared at the smallest and roundest of the three things.

"That what's? What?" it answered.

The slenderest creature—the one with the trailing fibrillae instead of legs—then said in a soft, gentle voice, "You'll get used to Fsm1, Roger. He works backwards. Or perhaps, from his viewpoint, we work backwards. It all depends."

"What is this?" cried Roger, a little hysterically, "a gag? A cheap trick?"

The third creature was hard, stiff, plated and insectoid. It made a growling noise.

"Shut up, Wissihillissis," said the slender one. The slender one was almost man-shaped except for its fibrillae. It had eyes in its head, recognizable eyes, two of them. It looked at Roger again. "You might say Wissihillissis's temper is mercurial." Then it laughed; a laugh that streamed out like watered silk. It had apparently made a joke.

Roger said, "But—I mean—what—"

"Oh, calm down," said the slender one. There was something prim and fussy about its voice. "I'll explain everything in a minute. I went to a great deal of trouble absorbing your cephalic emanations while you slept, so I could learn your silly thought processes and language. My name's Ugo. What *you'd* call a name, anyway. Actually, it's my galactic position

in solar code."

"Galactic? Solar?" said Roger. "You mean—"

THE SPHERICAL creature said, "Mean you? Solar? Galactic?"

"Fsm1!" said Ugo, turning his head. Her head. Its head. Whatever. "Try to control yourself!" Ugo looked at Roger again. "Fsm1's from Phoebe. He revolves East to West. Mentally and everything."

"Phoebe?" said Roger. "But isn't that the ninth moon of Saturn?" He knew this off-hand from his science stories.

"Indeed it is," said Ugo.

"But—"

"Look," Ugo said. "We can talk later. Right now we've got to get comfortable. In fact, that's imperative. We're all pretty tough and adaptable; but we can't stand this silly bland climate of yours much longer without serious consequences. You'd better ask us in the house."

"Ask you *in*? *In the house*?"

"Well, what else do you do with visitors?" said Ugo, a little poutishly. "My gracious, even on Venus we have hospitality."

"*Venus*?" Roger's voice was getting high-pitched and hoarse.

"Ask us in, ask us in," said Ugo wearily....

Roger stuck his head in the door. Peter was up and in the kitchen rummaging the cereal boxes. Genevieve was still in bed. Roger said, "Dear—"

"Hm?" she opened one sleepy eye.

"We have company, dear."

"Oh. That's nice," said Genevieve, and closed the eye again.

"Company," said Roger gently. "Visitors. Three of them."

Genevieve sat up suddenly. "What? What did you say? Company—this time of the morning? Who on earth—"

"Nobody on earth," said Roger sadly.

Genevieve got up and slipped into a robe. "I can't let anybody see me this way! You let them in Roger—oh, and for Heaven's sake keep them out of the living room. All those papers and everything. It's a mess. I'll go put a face on. Who are they—some of your drunken friends from L.A.?"

"No," he said.

She looked a little startled. "Not Aunt Hattie?"

"Not your Aunt Hattie," said Roger.

"Well, then—who?"

"You go put a face on and get nice and awake. *Rèal* awake. And then I'll introduce you."

She left and he let them in, the three of them. Peter had his cereal on the table by now and he looked up and said, "Hello." Not particularly surprised.

Ugo stirred his fibrillae and said, "Hello there, Peter. I know all about you. I tranzed your mother thinking about you last night."

"Are you a dog?" asked Peter.

"Well, no, not exactly."

"A pony?"

WISSIHILLISSIS, the insectoid, moved about stiffly and made growling noises again.

"Oh, all right," said Ugo, turning to him. He explained to Roger: "Wissihillissis wants us to stop playing twenty questions and get settled. He's freezing to death."

"Freezing?" Roger wasn't really out of his first daze yet.

"Of course," said Ugo. "Hotter on Mercury, you know. Lots hotter. Especially on the sun-side. Let's see now, where could we put Wissihillissis—"

"The oven?" said Roger. It sounded zany; it sounded like another person saying something in his own voice.

"Why, yes," said Ugo. "That's perfect. All the way up to five-fifty Fahrenheit. It'll be cool, but he can

stand it." He slithered over to the oven on his fibrillae.

"You know how to light it?" asked Roger politely.

"Certainly," said Ugo. "I absorbed everything you know—and possibly a little more—last night."

"Oh," Roger said.

Ugo lighted the oven. Wissihillissis crawled in, making growling noises. Ugo said, "He tranzes it's a little chilly, but he can stand it."

Peter moved from the table and faced Ugo. "You didn't tell me yet whether you're a dog or a pony."

"We're neither, sonny," said Ugo in his soft voice. "We're Bems."

"What's a Bem, Daddy?" asked Peter.

Roger sighed. "He must have tranzed that word from my mind. It's used in science stories. A Bem is a B-E-M, Bug-Eyed-Monster, Peter. Only these fellows don't have bug eyes."

"It's a generic term," Ugo explained to Peter.

Peter said, "What's a generic term?"

"Be quiet, Peter," said Roger. "I've got to think."

"Oh plenty of time for that," Ugo said. "Let's get Fsml in a comfortable spot first."

Fsml, roundish and slow moving had been standing quietly by all this time. Now he said, "First spot comfortable a in Fsml get let's." East to West.

"All right, Fsml," said Ugo. "The refrigerator for you." To Roger: "It's cold on Phoebe, of course."

He put Fsml in the ice-box, removing shelves to give him room. He turned the control up high.

"And now," said Ugo, "I'll get myself set, and we can all relax a bit."

"And what is it *you* need?" asked Roger.

"I told you I was from Venus," Ugo said. "So if you don't mind I'll spend most of my time here under the hot

shower."

Roger listened, and the shower was running. "You'll have to wait—Genevieve's in there now."

"Well, tell her to hurry," said Ugo. "And tell her to take a good one—might be a while before she gets another."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Roger, out of his daze.

HE WENT to the bathroom. He walked to the steamed plastic shower curtains and said, "Honey—"

"I'll be through in a minute, Roger. Go entertain your guests. You might start breakfast for them. I think we have a dozen eggs."

"Honey, I—I have something to tell you. I want you to be patient. I want you to be calm and intelligent and listen without interrupting."

She turned off the shower, pulled back the top part of the curtain, looked at Roger in a patient way, and said, "Well, what is it now?"

He told her. It took a good five minutes, including interruptions.

She was a little pale and she said, "I don't believe it."

"Neither do I," said Roger. "Let's go out there and face them and maybe they'll be gone and we'll find out it was all a hallucination. I'd give anything to learn I have simple paranoia right now—"

They went out and Ugo was still there. He was sampling Peter's cereal. He looked up and said, "Is the coast clear to the bathroom yet?"

Genevieve steadied herself against the table, but she didn't faint.

Roger said, "Make—make me some coffee, dear. Thick. Black. And I think I'll have a drink while you're at it. I'll be back. I'm going to talk to Ugo while he takes his shower."

When the hot water was on full blast and the room was full of steam Ugo at last gave a sigh of satisfaction.

He put his head near the curtain. "Now I'll explain everything."

"It's about time," said Roger.

"Time, shmime," said Ugo. "There is no time. Except as there is space—which is really time and energy both. But then you wouldn't know about inversity. I'm surprised you got as far as you did with what little you do know."

"Now, look here—" said Roger.

"Sure, I know. You have a degree and your patents bring you an income. You don't impress me. Anyway, we didn't come here to be impressed or charmed. We just wanted a close look."

"At what?"

"Earth. Fairly silly place. We've been watching a long time—sensing, really. We used to try to contact Earth all the time so we could complete things by bringing it into the Solar Union. But you Terrans would never respond. Naturally we couldn't interchange until you did. Well, you've changed that with your attractor, or whatever you call it. Of course it's physical and crude, and nothing like tranzing, but I must admit we hadn't thought of it."

"Just what is this tranzing business?" asked Roger.

"Tranzing," said Ugo, "is everything. The essence of everything—which of course means merely a reduction to essential nothingness of all entities. Your poets know this instinctively. They've been making statements like that a long time."

"Go on," said Roger. He wished the daze would leave.

"Well, that's all, really. Your little boy went out last night to fool with your machine—he wanted to get some trucks, I think. Children are more receptive, so we tranzed him. Made him put on full power and tune it to us. And here we are."

"But—but now that you're here?

I mean—what? I mean, what happens next?"

"That depends," said Ugo.

"But I can't just—I mean—how long are you going to stay?"

"That depends, too," said Ugo. "It boils down to a mathematical problem. It'll take us awhile. Fsm1's tranzing the cybernetics of it right now. As soon as he gets the symbols established, we can cross-tranz. Then we've got a start."

"I don't think I understand," said Roger.

"Of course you don't," Ugo said. "You just go have your coffee and then continue with your work. Just pretend we're not here. We'll let you know when we've got everything tranzed out."

ROGER groaned, sighed, shrugged his shoulders and then went back to the kitchen.

Genevieve said, "Roger—what am I going to do? I opened the oven to get a pot, and that thing in there growled at me."

"I know, I know," said Roger helplessly.

"And the one in the ice box—I can't get the milk. He's got it crowded all behind him. He won't move. I think he's asleep or something."

"He's just tranzing," Roger said.

"But what are we going to do?" said Genevieve.

"I don't know." Roger sat down and said, "I'll have that drink now. Make it two."

Genevieve said, "I think I'll have one myself."

They floated through the rest of the morning, each in a half-daze. They drove Peter to school and then they drove around aimlessly in the fishtail sedan, discussing all of it. They didn't want to be where any of the Bems could hear them.

"All that hot water!" said Roger.

"And gas for the oven—and current for the refrigerator! Think what the bills will be!"

"How am I ever going to get into the bathroom," said Genevieve, "with that—that *thing* in there. He reminds me of a hairdresser I had, the way he talks."

Roger said, "Maybe we ought to call the state police, or something."

"Why don't you just throw them out and tell them to go back where they came from, dear?"

"Well—" said Roger. He flexed his muscles uncertainly.

"Wait a minute," said Genevieve suddenly. "Remember how we got rid of that drunken pal of yours from Pasadena that time?"

"If you mean Freddy Newman," said Roger, bristling, "he's no more drunken than anybody else. And besides, we're fraternity brothers."

"But you do remember how we got rid of him."

"Sure. By being inhospitable. Only we discovered that trick with your Aunt Hattie, not Freddy Newman."

"Well, that's all beside the point. But we can use the same principle with these friends of yours. Turn off the gas. The water. The electricity. Maybe they'll be uncomfortable enough and leave."

"All right," said Roger. "It's a good idea. But I wish you wouldn't refer to them as friends of mine."

"I don't know," said Genevieve. "Somehow they remind me of your friends."

"Somehow," answered Roger, "they remind me of your Aunt Hattie."

They drove back to the house.

UGO, FSM1 and Wissihillissis, all three of them, were lined up in the kitchen.

"Well, what now?" asked Roger.

Fsm1 said, "Now what well?"

Wissihillissis growled.

Ugo said, "In effect, we all tranz this. Don't try to pull anything funny, see?"

"What do you mean?"

"We tranzed you out there in the car," said Ugo. "Don't call any state police and don't turn off any water or gas or electricity—get me?" Somehow his soft lisp made it all the more sinister.

Roger looked at Genevieve, and she looked at him. Stunned.

"Now, then," said Ugo. "We're all going back to our places and get comfortable again. You go on with your work. Wissihillissis is trying to remember. As soon as he does Fsml and I can go further with the problem."

"What's he trying to remember?" asked Roger.

"How he made that crude machine of yours work when it first brought us here. He has a very bad memory even if he is clever at meta-ecology. If we don't figure out the right combination again, we don't get back."

"I'll figure it out!" said Roger. "By the great Clancy, I'll figure out how to get rid of you if it's the last thing I do!"

"Good," said Ugo. "You might stumble on it by accident, at that."

Genevieve stepped forward and said, "You three—uh—gentlemen *are* ready to leave, then?"

"Of course," said Ugo. "We tranzed your planet thoroughly, close range, in the last hour. Nothing here for us. Nothing here for any *intelligent* being."

"Hmph," said Genevieve, but they didn't pay any attention to her. They went back to their places: Ugo to the shower, Wissihillissis to the oven, and Fsml to the refrigerator.

"If it's the last thing I do," muttered Roger, and headed for the lab again.

He started right in, and he worked hard. He started at the beginning

again. He went over the whole theory of scanning, molecular separation and quanta adhesion. He used a slide rule, a table of logs, a calculator, a Weston meter, and sheets and sheets of graph paper. Every once in a while he went back to his device and tried it again. Something seemed to have happened to it. He tried all kinds of settings, but it wouldn't even pull space particles any more.

He was thinking of switching from attraction to repulsion when Genevieve called him for lunch. "I was going to make a pie," she said a little pointedly, "but I can't use the oven. There isn't even room in the refrigerator to cool Jello. How about cookies?"

"Go way," said Roger, not hearing her. "No lunch."

She shrugged and went away.

HE WORKED on into the afternoon. He got nowhere. Precisely nowhere.

He came back, weary, into the house when it was getting dark, and Genevieve and Peter were sitting at the big kitchen table eating canned beans. He said, "Where are the—guests?"

"In their usual places," said Genevieve.

He went back to the bathroom where the hot water was running full tilt and he started out by saying, "Now, see here, Ugo—"

"All right," Ugo said, sticking his head from the curtains, "so you want to get rid of us. Might have expected it from an Earthman. Well, don't worry—we'll go as soon as we figure out how. Wissihillissis finally remembered his relationships; but Fsml's having trouble with the cybernetics, so we can't coordinate. Incidentally; you're all off on your fighting out there in the lab. You'll have to stop doing it. You're clouding up our tranzing; we can't feel ourselves think."

"That's the last straw!" said Roger. "Now I've got to stop on account of you guys! The greatest thing in history, and you three come along and—"

"Don't be too sure it's the greatest thing in history," said Ugo sharply. "There's such a thing as going too far. A circuit has a certain capacity, it shouldn't overload. Dammit, how can I explain this clearly to your mind? Roger, you ought to learn to tranz—we'd communicate a lot easier."

"Oh, nuts," said Roger, and went back to the kitchen.

After supper Genevieve put Peter to bed and Roger made another pot of coffee and then both of them sat in the living room and sipped. Silence for a while.

"Well?" said Genevieve finally. "Figure anything out yet?"

Roger looked at the floor. "It's what Ugo said. It stays with me. He said I ought to learn to tranz."

"Just what is this tranz business anyway?" asked Genevieve.

"That's it," said Roger, getting up. "That's the whole point." He started to pace.

"What, dear?" Genevieve was patient. She knew the pacing mood.

"Suppose tranzing," said Roger, "is the mental technique that embraces everything we don't know—or do know imperfectly. Telepathy—extrasensory perception—psycho kineses—we're beginning to learn about these things. But suppose it goes further. Suppose it's a kind of thinking with the soul, whatever that might be. And suppose it explains things like instinctive morals, the kind that always baffle the man-is-just-an-animal school. Suppose it explains all the ghost stories, and the disappearance of the *Marie Celeste* and the frogs that fall from the air, and the dreams that forecast events, and the fact of genius, and inspiration, and prayer and the pineal gland and evolution and the begin-

ning and the end—"

"All right, suppose it does," said Genevieve.

Roger thought for another moment. "It wouldn't be right for one of us to get all of it. Too much for our psychic circuits. Yes—that's what Ugo meant. And I'm getting some of it, now. Some of it—"

"Roger, that's a funny look in your eye."

"I can remember suddenly every detail of everything I ever did. Total recall. I guess that's another thing tranzing explains. Right now I can see every word on every page of a G. A. Henty book I read when I was twelve—"

"Roger, are you all right? Maybe I'd better call a doctor."

"Sh!" He waved at her impatiently. "I'm on the edge. Right on the edge. I've got something. I've got an idea. I—I—of course! Now I know how to get those Bems back where they came from!"

"Roger!" Genevieve got up. "You're as green as a persimmon!"

He didn't answer. He ran into the bathroom.

UGO STUCK his head from the shower curtains and said, "Yes, I tranzed you. It's a good idea. Darned if you didn't hit on it, hyperbolic as it sounds: So simple we'd have never tranzed it out among the three of us. Our minds are too complicated, I guess. I congratulate you."

"You're—you're ready to go then?" asked Roger.

"Immediately," said Ugo.

Fsml and Wissihillississ were already waiting when they got to the kitchen. Everybody trooped out to the lab shack again.

The three Bems climbed on the platform under the antenna. Roger carefully set every dial, every switch, every vernier, every combination ex-

actly as it had been when the Bems first came from space and he first found them. Exactly the way he remembered everything with his new total recall. He hurried. He had the feeling his total recall would be only temporary.

He made only the necessary adjustments to provide repulsion instead of attraction in the focusing center.

He threw the switch and the Bems became glowing things, shrank, and finally disappeared.

"Good-by," said Roger.

There was no answer....

The next morning at breakfast Genevieve said to Roger, "Did it really happen, or was it all a dream?"

Roger said, "It must have happened." He looked at the calendar. Then he stepped to the phone. "Would you mind telling me what day this is?" he asked the operator. She told him. He hung up and said, "The thirteenth. It was the eleventh when we went to bed two nights ago. So either we both slept through a day and dreamed the same thing—or it really happened."

Peter said, "Daddy, where's the nice doggy with the long hair he walks on?"

"Back on Venus, I hope," said Roger.

"Where's Venus?" asked Peter.

"*Mas alla*," said Genevieve. It was still the only Spanish she knew. She turned to Roger. "Dear—if it happens again—I mean, that machine of yours—"

"I'm knocking it apart. To hell with it," said Roger. "Anyway, since I tossed the bug-eyed monsters back into space with it, it won't work the same. Overload, I guess. And I might spend forever trying to find the right combinations again; I was lucky the first time, that's all."

"I'm glad, Roger," said Genevieve. "There was something—I don't know—something *too much* about the darned thing. The way I felt about the atom when they first brought it out. We'll be happier, Roger, if we just go on more or less the way we were. I don't mean stagnate or anything, but anyway, not go forward too fast. I'm sure of this."

"What makes you so sure?" Roger asked.

"I tranzed it," she said, and then got up and walked around the table and kissed him.

HOW SMART ARE YOU?

By
RALPH ORTIZ

IT WOULD be nice to have a penny for every "intelligence" test that schools, the military, business and so forth have given out in the last ten years. It seems to be a standard belief among many people that the measure of a person's intelligence can be perfectly given by Binet, the Rohrschach etc. Frankly, we don't believe it!

When a man sits down to take a test like this, he's working under pressure. So allowances have been made for this? Still, how can the tension be eliminated? In addition we are such a complex blend of abilities, skills, learning, bits of knowledge, that it is inhumanly possible to catalogue us. So the tests show that Joe Blow has no aptitude for doing this or that. But Joe Blow happens to love this or that. So he goes ahead and does it and through sheer determination and energy and love, makes a go of it. What does that prove?

Simply that there are other factors than so-called intelligence.

A number of prominent psychiatrists have suggested that such tests may do more injury than good to the individual taking them. Believing what they, the tests say, that person may follow their advice, though fundamentally, the results may be wrong. Thus a great disservice has been done. In addition such tests may induce feelings of inferiority.

So the next time you take an intelligence test, or a test designed to show up your skills, regard it with respect—but not with worship. It may be wrong. The hardest thing in the world to judge or analyze is a human being. Compared with a person a complicated calculating machine is a simple toy. Therefore let the testers beware. You can't catalogue or stamp human beings like sausages.

THE NAUTICAL EGG-BEATER

By
A. T. KEDZIE

IN SPITE of all the advances in rocketry and aeronautics, it appears as if ships, both big and little will be with us for quite a while. But even the most conservative of arts—that of ships and sailing—has come under the spell of scientific progress and the vessels of the future will be quite different from those of the past or present.

It is in ships, large ones, that atomic power is likely to be first applied; high speeds will demand super-streamlining and the coming ships will undoubtedly look a great deal like fish or torpedoes as they skim furiously over the surface of the water. As little as possible of the vessel should be beneath that surface in order to minimize the considerable effort of forcing masses of water aside.

But the real future revolution in ship and boat-building stems from an ingenious invention called the "cycloidal propellor" or in more descriptive terms, "the nautical eggbeater". Since the replacement of the paddle wheel by the screw propellor, practically no change in basic ship propulsion has occurred. That is, until the cycloidal propellor. This is more than a gadget. It is a completely new method of driving a vessel through water.

In the bottom of the ship is a large

circular plate fitting flush with the bottom stern plates. Projecting downwards into the water are four or six blades similar to airplane propellor blades. The whole disc rotates driven from within the hull. A similar disc is usually located on the other side of the ship.

Here are the properties: one, with two such discs, no rudder is needed and the boat can turn rapidly within its own length! In some respects it maneuvers like a scuttling crab. Two, the speed of the craft is up as much as thirty per cent with the same horsepower.

This combination is irresistible. The maneuverability is incredible, even more important than the speed. A ship equipped with a pair of cycloidal propellers can dash straight for a dock at full speed and then when within a mere length or two of the dock, it can abruptly make a right angle turn, cut its engines and float gently to the dock! This behavior is fantastic for any sort of a craft floating in water.

At present the vessels using the nautical eggbeater are still experimental, but there is little doubt that the new system will eventually be almost universal. It is an example of one of those little things that do so much to change the future, yet are so little acclaimed.

THEY DIDN'T WALK AWAY . . .

BY CHARLES RECOUR

WE WERE standing in the observation dome watching the rocket come into Copernicus City. It's always a thrilling sight, even to hardened old space-hands—after all, men have been on the Moon only a dozen years—and well worth the two credit fee.

Ordinarily you only hear the radar men talking with the craft after they pick it up. This is for effect and the public goes for the business-like conversation in a big way. Then you see the pinpoint of light against the backdrop of space and unlike the stars, it's moving.

Quickly it comes in, grows larger and soon is visible as a steel needle. Skillfully the pilot will cut his velocity and bring the rocket toward the burnt and pocked field, balancing it on its tail, holding its nose vertical with the gyros and bucking Lunar gravitation with the rockets. Then at the right moment the rocket settles with a shaking thump, right smack on its tail. The flames die and the rocket's in... ordinarily.

We watched this one, one of the new "Fletchers" a big hundred and fifty foot job, follow through. It came in toward the port beautifully. The pilot was "Hot Rocket" Wilson, an old hand at the game—he claimed he's landed more rockets than anyone of Spaceways Inc.

He came in smoothly, almost braking to a stop with his nose rockets. We waited eagerly, breathlessly, for him to spin the rocket around on its gyros. The ship seemed to quiver for a moment. And there was much too long a time-lag between the breaking and the spinning. In fact, the rocket never completed the spin-around.

It hung a mile or so in the airless space above the pumice surface of the landing field. It hung there briefly.

One of the radar men's voices came screaming over the P. A. system, "My God! He's going to drop!" The voice broke off in a gasp, as almost of personal agony.

And it happened. Even slowly, it seemed to our unbelieving eyes, the rocket started to fall. In seconds in reality—though it seemed like hours—the rocket fell Lunarward.

There was a vast column of Pumice sent high into the air, and the rocket shook as her fuel went off like apyrotechnic display.

We watched the emergency crews speed for the inferno—but we knew it was too late. Anyone still alive after the crash would certainly die in the flare of fuel.

We were a sober and shaken crowd when we left the observation dome. It's hard to see people die two hundred and fifty thousand miles from home...

THE EYES ARE

There was simply no reason for a spy to be spying . . . which was why Martha's job made no sense until Roger caught her taking a bath!



"Don't look away!" Martha said sharply. "He's about ready to speak to you!"

WATCHING



By
Walt Sheldon

CHAPTER I

R OGER LEIGH showered first. Then he stalked through the hallway of the Officer's Barracks in a striped beach robe, entered his own small room, stripped, and before he reached for the civilian clothes Counter Intelligence had given him, he glanced at himself in the mirror over the chest-of-drawers.

He saw himself: tall, muscular, hard

as nails and unblemished except for a spear-shaped birthmark between his shoulder blades, a patch of tan faint enough to be almost unnoticeable. He saw himself: lithe and young—twenty-seven years old to be exact.

"Twenty-seven," he muttered, staring for a moment into the mirror.

He said it as a woman might say forty. The fact was, that in the Space Force a man of twenty-seven was old. Roger was an old man. He had been through the Last of Wars and he had been to the Moon and he had reached the rank of Rocket Leader—and he was an old man. If he doubted it he had only to remind himself that he'd been permanently earthed and that his place now was a swivel chair in General "Blast" Kerrigan's headquarters and that instead of giving him space patrols they gave him jobs like the one he was about to do.

Which reminded him. He checked the civilian clothes lying on his bunk once more and found everything there. Not that he doubted Counter Intelligence would do things right—he just wanted to check. Maybe, too, he wanted to put off donning the things for another moment or two.

He started to dress slowly. He kept looking at his space uniform which hung over a chair near the chest-of-drawers. He hadn't owned anything but a uniform for ten years now, and his blood raced a little as he looked at the deep indigo color they called space-black and the patterns of silver dots on the sleeve and collar that marked his rank. They looked like the bright baleful holes in space that were stars, moons and planets.

Roger sighed. Outside a sub-atmosphere rocket howled from its rack and he heard the sound and sighed again.

An old man. He rubbed his nose which had a sharp break halfway down the bridge; he scratched his jaw

which had little white scars running along its underside. These and the faintly sallow skin all spacemen have were his only marks of being the old man he was. He sat down on the bunk and slipped into the civilian socks and shoes. As he tied the second shoe there was a knock on the door.

"It's open," he called, and looked up.

General Blast Kerrigan walked in.

His name wasn't really Blast, it was Oliver P. Kerrigan, but only clerks and such people knew that. To the men of his command—the experimental space base here at Newmex—he was Blast Kerrigan. In the fapapers and in the microfilm histories of the Last of Wars he was Blast Kerrigan. He may have been Oliver to his mother, but that was open to question because anyone who had ever served under him swore he never had a mother but came roaring one day, full-blown, from a red-hot Venturi tube.

KERRIGAN was little and stubby and he had upswept black mustaches and rolled when he walked. He said, "What the hell, Roger. Aren't you ready yet?"

"I had to shower, General," Roger said.

"For this dirty job?" said Kerrigan. "This is a dirty, dirty job. You didn't have to shower." He started to pace the room. You could never really tell when Blast Kerrigan was talking in allegories or when he was being literal. He used the same tone—a kind of bark—for everything. He stopped suddenly and pointed to Roger's back. "Where did you get that?"

"What, sir?"

"The mark between your shoulder blades. A scar?"

"It's a birthmark," said Roger, a little miffed.

"Huh. Could swear I saw one like

it somewhere on somebody else. Tan and spear-shaped like that. Well, it doesn't matter. What matters right now is this Space Officer Bell. As soon as you find out what you're supposed to find out I, personally, am going to chew and chew with a fine vengeance upon Space Officer Bell. I am really an artist at chewing out Space Officers. I've made a study of it. Sometimes I think that's why they made me a general, Roger. Because I can make young Space Officers with unstrung tongues wish they'd never been born."

"Yes, sir," said Roger. He was thinking that Blast Kerrigan could probably do the same to all ranks: Space Officer, Space Officer First Class, Captain, Rocket Leader and even Task Commander. He was beginning to feel a little sorry for this indiscreet kid, Jimmy Bell, he was supposed to spy on. Bell had been talking. A Counter Intelligence man had heard him mention the XX-13 by name in a bar, in the presence of a girl. The girl had been reported as beautiful. Bell had also said something about cracking the speed of light. This was bad, very bad.

Roger stood up, put his shirt on and then went to the mirror and started to tie his flowered tie.

"You *look* like a civilian," said Kerrigan. "What the hell, you *look* like a civilian."

"Is that a compliment, General," said Roger, grinning, "or—"

"It's a complaint." Kerrigan sat down on the chair right on top of Roger's neatly hung space uniform. He hauled a cigar from his tunic pocket. "It's a complaint about things in general. It's a moan, Roger, a moan of pain. Sometimes I almost wish there wasn't a World State and we had a nice war again. I know it's wrong to say that, but, dammit, I had fun

in the war." He stuck the cigar in his mouth and looked toward the window, and on beyond it, and seemingly out into space. He looked dreamy.

Roger glanced at the general sideways, then kept tying his tie. He had a feeling Blast Kerrigan hadn't given the real nature of his complaint and, in fact, probably didn't recognize it. But there was something about things in general these days that gave even Roger a restlessness. And an odd, faint sense of disaster coming. There were the things a man saw in space—the things he *felt* out there sometimes. Shapes whizzing by on the screens. Sometimes elongated, sometimes ovoid, sometimes just blots of shapes. You could never quite describe them clearly. You could never even be really sure you saw them. And top level security always hushed up the reports on them anyway. Well, the things in space were one thing and the speed with which men were starting to move was another. Man was ready to bust out of the solar system: it was just a matter of engineering details now. He had his bases on the moon, two exploring parties had been to Mars and the Q-scanners had examined everything else in sight and now it was clear enough that the solar system was virtually a useless waste. The outer planets were out of the question. Mercury was at once too hot and too cold and too near the sun anyway. Venus was known now to have broken originally from Jupiter and was just a hard core wrapped in noxious fog. Both Mars expeditions had perished: they'd found little of use in the thin atmosphere and hadn't been able to return. But now that enormous technological advances had been made since the Last of Wars and now that there was a World State a Mars trip was much more practicable. Only the possibilities these days went even beyond that.

Just to think of it made Roger itch and squirm inside. For some reason.

THE GENERAL turned toward him again and said abruptly, "Roger, we have something in common."

"What, sir?"

"We are both old men. Very old men. You're twenty-six or -seven probably, and I'm all of thirty-eight. You're an old man, and I'm a *hell* of an old man."

"Well, I wouldn't say that exactly, sir," said Roger.

"You'll say it," barked Kerrigan. "Before you're through here you'll say it. You'll say it exactly and you'll say it in loud ringing tones as if you believed it, which you will." He got up again; he paced and waved the cigar as he talked. "We haven't got a Space Force base here, we've got a baby farm. A passel of babies. They've got to be to jump these experimental models in the first place. They haven't been through what we've been through, Roger; none of them has been in war and none of them ever took a flying jump at the moon. None of them ever based on a Moonport for a year at a time for five years and then got earthed for over-age like you, Roger."

"Yes, sir," said Roger, a little wearily. He wanted to get going now. He didn't want the general reminding him of things.

"So, what happens?" asked Kerrigan, still pacing. "These baby-faced pilots of ours get out there in the town and walk around in sloppy uniforms and flap their mouths like so many blast fins! It's supposed to be a *secret*, what we're doing here! How can you explain this to a bunch of kids who think because there's little chance of another war there's no more danger? How can you explain this to Space Officer James Bell, who you

are about to follow, and who you are, I hope, about to draw and quarter but good."

Roger said, "I don't really think this thing with Bell will turn out to be serious—"

"There you go," said Kerrigan. "Thinking. I thought you'd been to the moon. I thought you'd been in a war. I thought you understood that in the Space Force nobody below the rank of General is supposed to think."

Roger sighed and said, "Okay, sir; I'll see what I can do."

"I want a report when you get back," said Kerrigan, pointing the cigar. "I want a report on where he went and what time and how many times he blinked his eyelashes. So good luck and God bless you and now get the hell out of here before you miss him."

"Yes, sir," said Roger. "Only just one more thing."

"What now?"

"When I get off this detail, how about a chance at some flying and spacing again? I get earth-happy sitting around in an office. How about a little rocket work. You're a General, sir. You could fix it. They always told us in space cadets Generals could fix anything."

Kerrigan lowered a black eyebrow. "I suppose you'd like a crack at the XX-13; itself?"

"No, sir." Roger grinned. "I'm an old man, General. I'm a doddering twenty-seven. Just a nice little hot sub-atmo job will do. Something to go up to sixty or a hundred miles above sea level and streak around a bit. I'd be happy to deliver packages for you, General. You don't want to send a box of cigars to any classmates in China, perchance, do you, General?"

"Well, I'll see about it when you

get back," growled Kerrigan. "You blast off, now. Blast fast, Rocket Leader, and don't take time to salute."

Roger kept grinning and said, "Yes, sir," and saluted, and left.

But he didn't feel as good as his grin looked; he didn't feel good at all. The General's mood had been wet and cloudy for all the banter—it made Roger feel that way, too. It gave him the feeling of foreboding, the inexplicable feeling that something was wrong everywhere and that not knowing what it was made it all twice as bad. He'd had the feeling before, alone, in space.

HE GOT into his convertible, racked the top down, drove to the gate, checked out, then parked about a hundred feet from the gate where he could watch. It was a big base and he'd never seen Space Officer Bell personally; but he knew his car, license number and description. He knew that Bell had a date with this woman he'd been seen talking to—they'd tapped the base phone to find that out. Martha McLeod was her name; they were checking on her now and knew so far only that she worked at the radiophone exchange and lived by herself in a small apartment near the edge of town.

Roger lit a cigarette.

He sat in the sun and his skin and the plastic-leather cushions got warmer by the minute. He felt sleepy. He sat there and thought about how he was twenty-seven and an old man, because that was what he thought about whenever it was quiet and he was alone. He kept at least one eye open and on the gate...

So here he was an old man. At seventeen he'd entered Space Cadets; his father, long dead, had been a forest supervisor in Arizona and he'd had connections through a congressman

who liked to hunt and fish. Before that Roger hadn't known much more than the desert and forest in which he'd been raised—he'd been born in a trail cabin with no help for his mother but an Indian who had later disappeared. He'd found the physical ordeal of Space Cadets easy enough, and he'd worked hard to pass the technical grades. Four years of Space Cadets, a year of Rocket Tactical, and that made him twenty-two and then they sent him into space. He saw the last two years of the Last of Wars. Except for a month's leave every year, then, he stayed in space. He did tours on the moonports and patrols almost to the orbit of Mars. Then, at twenty-seven, he was through. Another ten years and he'd retire; he'd be a very, very, very old man just like Blast Kerrigan, unless maybe he stayed on as a General.

While he was thinking of all this a bright red and yellow coupe came to the gate and Roger saw the slim shoulders of the man behind the wheel, and the patch of pale blond hair showing where the spacecap was tilted, and he knew this would be Space Officer Bell. He started his own car. As soon as Bell emerged and turned left, toward the town, Roger started his own car and followed.

The coupe kept going down the long highway across the sagebrush meadows. The space base was on a rise and Roger could see the town spread out ahead and below. Sleepy town, sunny town, peaceful town. Everybody talked about peace these days—as if perhaps secretly they didn't quite believe it. Maybe they all sensed in some odd way the indications that were all carefully indexed and filed in the most secret drawer of the most secret file cabinet of the most secret room in the most secret building in the World Capitol.

Task Commander Cardenas, beyond moon, April 12, 2012, A.D.: "...at least ten of these shapes whizzed by faster than any speed the enemy is supposed to have. Reports of their form vary from disk-like to ovoid..."

Dr. Edward Ling-Tao, attached to Project 32197-A, from Base Camp of Cosmic Ray Expedition 92, Theophilis Craters "...as a psychiatrist specializing in space psychiatry I can nevertheless offer no rational explanations for the emanations, attractions, mental influences or whatever they were which appeared to come on that occasion from the direction of Mars. The eighty per cent incidence of severe paranoia among the members of the expedition following that incident is now a matter of record..."

Roger had done a short tour in Counter Intelligence in the World Capitol before being assigned to General Kerrigan, that was how he knew of these things. The one that stayed most vividly in his mind, however, was the report of the Director of Archives.

He could almost quote it verbatim. *"This office respectfully calls attention to the similarities between the strange, inexplicable shapes reported by many space pilots and the 'flying saucers' which created so much comment in the last century..."*

But you couldn't tell these things to kids like Space Officer Bell. You couldn't tell them why there had to be a hush blanket even though the conflict called the Last of Wars had been fought. You couldn't get them just to take your word for it, either, as an old soldier might have done.

ROGER DROVE steadily until Bell led him to the center of town and to a brightly lighted bistro labeled the Moonport Bar and Grill. Roger watched Bell park and go inside,

then he himself parked on the other side of the street, gave Bell just enough time to get settled and followed.

He stood near the door for a moment after he got in. He blinked. The place was basically a bar room with tables and booths, but it was done up to represent the popular idea of a moonport. It had weird cardboard cut-out foliage growing here and there. High murals depicted bug-eyed monsters chasing scantily dressed babes among fantastic ferns. Roger smiled a little. Anyone who had ever looked out over a cold moonscape and wished for a green leaf or a woman or any living thing—

Oh, well. He moved toward the bar, looked over the booths across from it and then suddenly saw Space Officer Bell. The blond youngster was sitting across the table from a girl. The girl was so extraordinarily beautiful that Roger stopped short and swallowed and his eyebrows went up like a sub-atmo rocket blasting off. He stood there and stared until a waiter bringing them drinks moved into his line of vision.

Then he remembered his duty and walked across the room to the empty booth just behind the two of them.

CHAPTER II

HE HAD another short look at the girl before he sat down. She was blonde, but her hair was brighter and more the color of autumn corn than Bell's. She wore it in the ancient Navajo style with bangs and a bun tied with yarn that had become so popular lately. Her face was triangular; her lips broad and full. The faintest suggestion of slant to her eyes. Her chin was small, but strong. Very strong, Roger felt.

After he was in the booth behind

them he could hear her voice. It was a low, rich voice and she found her words easily, yet spoke slowly and carefully.

"Jimmy," she was saying, "you must see my side of it. You want to marry me. You want *me* to fall in love with *you*. But suppose I did, and then—then something happened."

"Martha," said Bell—his voice was not exactly high-pitched, but it had the thin earnestness of youth—"for the hundredth time, there's no danger of anything happening."

"But you've already admitted you're going to make this test jump, or whatever it is."

"Yes. But I've been trained, and everybody knows what he's doing. There's no reason for worry."

"Jimmy, how can I explain to you what I feel? You've told me you were going to travel faster than light. You said you're jumping a new and untested ship. If only I knew more. If only I knew more about what was going to happen to you—"

Roger stiffened and his hand, on the table-top, closed into a fist. The scar across the break in his nose turned white for a moment. This was no accidental foolishness. This girl was deliberately trying to find out things. A pump-job if ever he'd heard one. But why? *And for whom?*

Bell said, "You know I can't tell you any details, honey. I guess I've already shot off my mouth too much. 'Course I know it won't get any farther than you, but even so—"

"Jimmy," said Martha, "I must know. Don't you see, I must know. These military secrets are just a custom from the old days, don't you see that? There's no such thing as an enemy in the world any more. Everybody knows that."

"Well," said Bell, very slowly, and obviously very thoughtful, "you could

be right at that about the thing—"

Roger opened his fist again. It was time to deactivate this little tete-a-tete right now before Bell told all. That, as far as he could see now, was his first duty.

He got up. He stumbled from the booth. He loosened his face. He swung around unsteadily so that he leaned heavily on the back of Bell's seat and faced Martha. He grinned foolishly at her. "H'lo, honey!" he said thickly. "Say—how's a fella get a li'l service in this joint?"

Bell looked at him coldly. "Over at the bar, mister," he said. "Try the bar."

"Aw, the bar's no good." Roger hiccuped. "Bar's fer old fogies. I'm out fer a goo' time." He winked at Martha. "Say, honey, s'pose I put a l'il old peso in the juke box an' you an' me dance, huh? Your boy frien' won't mind."

"I'm afraid I would mind, fella." Bell was staring at him flatly; his voice was the dark side of Pluto. "Why don't you just blast-off quietly, now, and there won't be any trouble."

"Oh-ho!" roared Roger drunkenly, turning to the youngster. "So' it's trouble you're lookin' for, huh?"

YOUNG BELL seemed to sigh just briefly before he moved. And then he moved—fast. He came up out of the booth like something hurled from a catapult and he brought a short, hard, nicely timed left-hook along with him. Roger hadn't expected the left hook to be so short and hard. Most of all he hadn't expected it to be so nicely timed. It caught his jaw, just on the underside, right where a patchwork of tiny, almost invisible scars blossomed. It sent him staggering back.

Roger lifted his arms and fists, but

he was off-balance. Bell came out of the booth and pressed on, lashing, one, two, like that. Roger blocked the first jab and the other caught him in the pit of the stomach. In a way that was fortunate: Roger was hard there; he had a tempered steel washboard for a stomach.

He gained a little more balance and at the same time he rolled forward and down, slipping under another punch. This kid Bell was light, but he was fast and he had all the nerve a rocket test pilot ought to have and a little bit more thrown in. Roger came up under Bell's last punch in the moment the kid was slightly off-balance from throwing it. He sent a hard one up, an uppercut with his thumb and folded fingers turned in.

The few people in the Moonport Bar and Grill had all turned to stare, open-mouthed, by now. The bartender had already left his place and was rushing across the room. The waiter was coming from another direction. Someone had started the juke-box and its moving picture was bright on the screen and its music was starting to blare.

Roger's uppercut missed the bull's eye, but grazed the side of Bell's jaw. It wasn't a knockout punch, but it was fairly uncomfortable. Bell's head snapped up and he staggered backwards.

Roger stepped forward then to put the youngster to sleep for a while. He sensed the movement to the side; from the corner of his eye he saw the blur of the yellow dress Martha was wearing.

Something hard came down on his head and he felt the force of it all the way down his spinal column. Things whirled. He knew he dropped to his knees but he couldn't do anything about it. He knew that he was

there on all fours shaking his head stupidly at the floor, but he couldn't do anything about that, either.

His limbs were stiff, his head was jelly. He heard voices; they sounded far away. Somebody wanted to call the police. Somebody else said no, no, never mind the police, it was just a little scrap and it would all be straightened out. Martha's voice: "Come on, Jimmy—we'd better get out of here." Movement, a forest of legs moving about at the level of Roger's head. What did she sock him with? somebody wanted to know. Her handbag, imagine that, said somebody else. She must have had rocks in her handbag. Fingers on Roger's shoulder, now. Come on, get up. Get up, you bum—

It was all starting to get a little clearer. Roger got to his feet and things sharpened a bit in his vision and he saw that the bartender and the waiter and one person and another were gathered around him. He rubbed his head. He blinked some more. He was almost back to normal, now. Bell and Martha had disappeared.

"Where did they go?" he asked thickly.

"Now look, fella," said the bartender, putting a hand on his arm, "don't go stirring up more trouble. You gonna be nice? You be nice and I'll buy you a drink."

It seemed an idea. Roger shrugged and said, "It's a deal." He needed time to clear his head and think, anyway. He was beginning to feel he hadn't used good judgement somewhere along the line. Maybe his reactions were slower than they used to be. Maybe he really was an old man, an old, old man...

The drink helped clear his head and then he remembered his impres-

sion that Martha had been deliberately pumping the kid. This Martha was no ordinary character. She should be looked into—that was his next move. He frowned and recalled his briefing and remembered her address. 2390 Cottonwood Drive. He bought the bartender a drink in return and then they shook hands and everything was buddy-buddy and he left.

2390 Cottonwood Drive was one of a block of ground floor apartments in a long adobe-style building, much like a tourist court. Cactus and a colorful serape showed in the front window. The other apartments looked quiet. Roger walked up to the door and knocked, and waited, and there was no answer. He hadn't expected one; it was just a precaution. He walked around to the back of the building. He was prepared to use a pocket knife or a two-by-four or whatever he could find, but he saw that the catch on the back window was open. He opened it, crawled in.

IT WAS a neat and comfortable place; Roger had come in by the kitchen and he saw a bathroom with a glass enclosed shower leading off from it, and then another door to the one big main room. There was a swinging door from the kitchen to the main room, it was arced back into a corner. He moved it out and peered behind it, assuring himself nobody hid there. Just in case. Nobody was there; just a broom and a couple of mops. He went into the main room. It was furnished in southwest style with a Navajo rug thrown over a day bed. Bookcases lined the walls and there were books. He examined some of the titles. *Material Progress and Social Stability. A Study of Q-Force. Technical Advances in Space Travel. The 2015 Yearbook of Rockets.*

Strange fare for a healthy and beautiful young girl.

There was a small desk and he burled through it, finding nothing more significant than an unpaid current radiophone bill. He checked the radiophone and noted the number for future reference.

While he was jotting he heard a step at the front door.

He moved quickly; he dashed into the kitchen. The lock on the front door clicked. He'd never make it out of the back window now without being discovered. He slipped into the triangular space behind the kitchen door, knocked over a mop, caught it to keep it from falling, and then stood there stiffly and waited.

He could hear someone coming into the main room, but he couldn't see in that direction. Through the crack of the opened door he could see only part of the shower room that led off from the kitchen. He tried to make his own breathing slow and even and steady—and most of all, noiseless. He could have sworn that his own breath going through his nostrils was loud as a twelve o'clock whistle.

The sound of footsteps out there was quick, light and purposeful, and somehow he knew it must be Martha McLeod. She seemed to be alone. He recalled his briefing again and then remembered that she worked a late shift at the radiophone exchange; probably she'd come home for a quick change and a bite before going to work. Probably she'd left Space Officer Jimmy Bell, wistful and cow-eyed, in some other bar. Roger wouldn't be surprised if the lad was getting quietly plastered by himself now; he wouldn't blame him, either.

Martha came into the kitchen, and he held his breath. Then he realized that was foolish because he couldn't

CHAPTER III

hold it forever, so he forced himself to breathe again. Quietly, quietly...

She dropped two magazines on the kitchen table. She went over to the far corner of the kitchen and checked the meter on the city hot water inlet. Roger was struck with the way she moved—not a wasted motion, not so much as an unnecessary movement of her little finger. It occurred to him that Bell wasn't to be blamed too much: a girl like this would have made even a hard-bitten old man like Rocket Leader Roger Leigh woozy-headed enough to spill military secrets.

Martha, her small, compact shoulders square, her long legs clocking over the plastic tiling, then went into the shower room. She left the door open. She walked over to the shower and turned it on.

Roger's eyebrows rose.

Martha ducked out of view beyond the door then and, as Roger gaped, her yellow dress came flying through the air across the framed aperture of the door and landed on the bench of the far wall. He heard her shoes drop. Her stockings fluttered past after that, and Roger almost cleared his throat to help himself be nonchalant—but he remembered the need for silence in time and managed not to do it.

Pink thingamabobs followed the stockings. He forced himself not to make a low whistle. He kept staring.

And then for a fleeting moment Martha McLeod stepped into view and pulled back the shower curtain and stepped inside the shower. In that fleeting moment Roger really saw only one thing. It yanked his attention from everything else—even the lithe perfection of Martha's uncluttered figure.

Between the girl's shoulder blades there was a slightly tan spear-shaped birthmark almost identical to the one Roger himself bore.

HE MUST have stepped back involuntarily.

A broom and two mops fell, clattered. It seemed like all the noise in the world.

Martha's blonde head popped suddenly from the shower curtains again. The sound of the shower stopped. He saw her violet eyes staring directly at the crack of the kitchen door and she called, "Who's that? Who's out there?" Her eyes weren't exactly frightened—they were alert, wary.

Roger sighed and stepped from his hiding place.

Her eyes widened; she gasped softly.

Roger said, "It's all right. I only want to talk to you."

"You get out of here! Do you hear? You get out!"

"I'll be waiting in the living room," said Roger, a little wearily. "You might as well finish your shower."

"Get out! I'll call the police! I'll—"

"In a way," said Roger, "I am the police." He took his pressed glassine identification from his pocket and tossed it into the shower room. "Look it over, Martha," he said. "I'll be waiting in the living room. You don't have anything to read nearer my mental level than *Material Progress and Social Stability*, do you?"

She'd regained some poise. Enough so that her voice was edged with ice. "Do you mind, whoever you are, getting out of sight so I can come from behind these shower curtains?"

"I mind," grinned Roger, "but I'll do it anyway."

He went into the living room. He sat down and lit a cigarette. He heard the shower-room door slam, and then he leaned back and waited.

She was very quick. She came out in a bright red-wool house-coat with a

white collar of nylon-fur. Her eyes were set hard, and there were bright dots of anger in them.

She tossed Roger's identification card back to him. She said, "Talk, Rocket Leader Leigh, and talk fast."

For the moment he couldn't talk. He could just stare at her and think how beautiful she was. Having already seen her at her best, so to speak, made the tightly wrapped house-coat no barrier to visual enjoyment at all.

"Talk," she said. "Explain."

"All right." Roger sighed a little and leaned back. He pulled up his knee and folded his hands around it. "First of all, what do you do with all the secret military information you get from Space Officer Jimmy Bell?"

She controlled herself well. Only one eyebrow moved, and that slightly. If Roger hadn't been watching closely he would have missed it. She said finally, "So that's it. I'm supposed to be a treacherous spy of some sort."

"A lovely one," said Roger, "but a spy nevertheless."

She laughed then. "You must see too many three-dimensional movies, Rocket Leader. Who would a spy spy for these days?"

"That's something I'd be interested to find out."

She shook her head. "You're all the same, aren't you?"

"Who?"

"You military fellows. Minds in a rut. Can't stand the thought that there's a World State and no enemy, so you make up imaginary enemies in your minds. Though who they're supposed to be, I don't know."

"Maybe the ants of the world," said Roger. "Maybe the League of House Pets deciding to turn against their masters. Maybe just a loose collection of chronic grippers." Then he shifted a little and said slowly, "May-

be something a little out of this world—"

AGAIN THAT one eyebrow moved. She crossed the room swiftly to the desk chair, sat, found cigarettes and lit one. She crossed her legs, showing her knees and a trifle more. "All right," she said suddenly, "I'll come clean. I'll play square with you."

"The bare facts, eh?" said Roger, grinning.

She ignored the crack. She drew deeply on the cigarette, then leaned forward. "There's an association," she said, "called Status Quo, Incorporated. Heard of them?"

He nodded, and his lip must have curled a bit.

She smiled. "Didn't think a Space Force man would appreciate them. As you know, they're against a lot of things. They're against one group hating another, they're against waste, and most of all they're against keeping a military establishment at all."

"Would it surprise you to know," said Roger carefully, "that I'm against all of those things—except the last?"

Martha shrugged. "It's possible. Only I've seen a lot of people kid themselves about what their ideals were, and then follow their ideals right up to the point where it interfered with their comfort, and never even know the difference."

"We're getting into heavy reading," said Roger, smiling. "I told you my appetites are light. Let's get back to the main point. You learn things from eager young Space Officers. You have a way of doing that. So who do you pass these things on to?"

"It is the policy," she said, "of Status Quo, Incorporated, to publicize everything that's being done by military establishments. Everything they can find out. And they've got a staff of high-priced lawyers to keep them

short of treason—largely because treason is meaningless in a World State. Is this too complicated for you to follow, Rocket Leader? I'll simplify it for you. You can't do a thing to me. You can't stop me from getting what information I can, by the methods I use, and you can't stop me from passing it on to Status Quo. Is that simple enough? Okay?"

Roger took a deep breath and butted his cigarette. He got up. "By a superb effort," he said, "above and beyond the line of duty, I manage to follow you. My opinion is that you are one grossly misguided tomato. But I don't suppose you're interested. There's just one more thing I'd like to ask you before I go."

"What?"

"How would you like to take a crack at pumping secrets from a Rocket Leader instead of a mere Space Officer?"

"Meaning you?"

Roger bowed.

She laughed harshly. "You're rank-conscious, aren't you? That's another thing with you military boys. It's practically the only snobbery we have left these days. No, Rocket Leader Leigh, I wouldn't care to try to pump secrets from you. It would mean I'd have to put up with your company for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time. I don't think I'd have the endurance. Now, would you mind hauling your rank down to half mast and getting the hell out of my apartment?"

"Okay," said Roger. "If that's the way you feel about it." He frowned at her. He wasn't sure just how to handle this thing.

She walked to the door and opened it and stood there, waiting for him. He shuffled back and forth a couple of times, then shrugged and went to the door.

Then as he passed her he had an-

other thought. "Oh—one more thing. What was in that handbag you hit me with?"

"Coins, keys, a compact and a small but effective twenty-five caliber automatic," she said without batting an eye.

"Oh," said Roger. He took another two steps. Then he turned a second time. "Uh—something else. Then this is all. Where did you get that spear-shaped birthmark between your shoulder blades?"

He wasn't prepared at all for her reaction this time. Both of her eyebrows went up. Her face became a shade lighter. Her eyes widened. She stared at him. "Just—just what *do* you know about—about things?"

Roger saw he'd hit something then, but he still didn't know just what. He decided to be cagey. "When you change your mind about that date," he said, grinning, "I may tell you more."

He turned quickly, strode across the lawn, then across the street to his parked car. He went off without looking back.

IT WAS late that night before his report was ready and he tracked down General Kerrigan and found him in the big hangar that housed the XX-13. The hangar was several miles from the main launching ramps and Roger had to pass two sets of guards to get to the area. Kerrigan was standing by himself, stubby legs spread, thumbs in his belt, looking up at the gleaming, towering flanks of the space ship.

"Thinking of taking a jump-off, General?" asked Roger.

Blast Kerrigan turned slowly, obviously coming out of a reverie. "Oh. You," he said. "Well?"

Roger handed him the report he'd typed. "You can read it later, sir," he

said, "and I'll give you a quick verbal."

"Shoot," said the General.

Roger told what had happened, leaving out the part about the birthmark, and not knowing quite why he did that. He added that Space Officer Bell was under self-arrest in his quarters.

Kerrigan nodded. He looked very tired this night. "Which means we've got nobody to make the test tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"That's the scheduled date. Every big-wig from the World Capitol will be observing on screens from several points. They'll be watching to see a ship crack the speed of light, go to Pluto's orbit and return. They'll be very unhappy when it doesn't happen."

Roger said, "Yes, sir." Absent-mindedly. He noticed only vaguely that the General had started to look at him in a steady and thoughtful way. Himself, he was staring at the big rocket ship, under-going feelings of both pride and awe, very much mixed together. There she stood, big and gleaming, and almost vibrating with a life of her own. She hadn't tasted space yet; she seemed eager to leap off. Roger knew all about her; he knew every last electro-joint in her; as exec he'd studied all her manuals as they were written and he'd spent hours down here at the hangar while they tested her controls and rockets and instruments. He knew all of her stages: the atomic take-off blast, the drop, and the hydrogen drive. He knew the complicated mechanism of her acceleration cradle which was sort of a super shock absorber and which still didn't prevent the healthiest young man you could find in the Space Force from blacking out when she moved.

The speed of light. Pluto and back. That was only the test. That was only a quick run and the light barrier would be crossed for only a few seconds during the trip. But it would be the beginning of extra solar system travel... this time the limits would really be in man's reach...

"Somebody," said the General, "has got to do this thing tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," said Roger again.

"Well, how about it?"

Roger turned slowly and looked at Kerrigan. "How about what?"

"You said you wanted to make a jump. I promised I'd fix it for you. How about it?"

"You mean—me? Jump the XX?"

"You," said the General. "Nobody else but you."

Roger said, "I—I hadn't thought about it. I didn't even dream—"

"Better accept quick, then," grinned Kerrigan. "You might start getting afraid if you start thinking about it. After all we don't know what'll really happen when you hit the speed of light. Some of our engineers and scientists have their doubts that you can get through the barrier, even in space. Hefferman swears you'll warp over into another dimension, although Bronsky says he's crazy."

"Cheerful thoughts you're having, General," said Roger.

"Aren't they?" Kerrigan put a cigar in his mouth. He said, "Well?"

"General," said Roger, "you've got a pilot. An old, old man of twenty-seven who ought to know better. I'll send you a post card from Pluto."

"Sure," said the General. "You can say 'Having a wonderful time—wish you'd never been born'. So go get yourself some sleep now. Be in good shape tomorrow. Be in the best shape you ever were. You jump off at noon. Get yourself to operations at eight.

and work out your synergy and course. Goodnight, Roger."

"Goodnight, General. Oh—one more thing."

"What?"

"Now that I'm about to be a dear old hero, I can ask special favors, huh?"

Kerrigan lowered an eyebrow and said, "Maybe."

"Well, I just wanted to ask you not to be too hard on Bell. He's really a good kid and this gal was just too smart for him. I'm sure he didn't do much harm. Go easy with him, won't you?"

"Roger," said the General, "I haven't eaten out a nice eager young space officer for years. This is my favorite recreation. I am not going to miss this opportunity. I am going to marshal all of my rare talents for being a holy terror and make Space Officer Bell wish he hadn't been born."

Roger said, "You shouldn't."

The General said, "I wouldn't be a general if I didn't. And don't tell me what I shouldn't do. You're not that much of a hero yet."

Roger shrugged. "You're the General, General. You're the General." He walked off and his frown was thoughtful and deep.

There was a note on the door of his room when he got there. It was a standard telephone message form. It said: *Rocket Leader R. Leigh. Call Miss McLeod: 7-8611.* Roger took the note from the door and headed back down the hall to the phone. He was smiling. Her curiosity had gotten the better of her sooner than he'd expected. And now his was aroused, again—he'd almost forgotten that odd birthmark of hers that so perfectly matched his own. Probably mere coincidence, but worth looking into just the same. He pictured Martha's face

and figure, remembering her. It would be a pleasure, a great pleasure. It would be a nice way to spend what might turn out to be his last night on earth...

CHAPTER IV

HE MET HER, of all places, in the Moonport Bar and Grill. They sat under a blue and scaly monster who was trying to get a Godiva-like young gal into his claws. Roger ordered drinks, then said, "Well, you said you had something important to tell me. Shoot."

She smiled. It was a slow smile; it was the kind of smile that can't quite be figured out right away. She said, "What I've got to tell you has to be worked up to. Believe me. And when I'm through you're still going to think one or both of us is crazy."

"Keep talking," said Roger.

She lit a cigarette. She blew a thin graceful stream of smoke into the air. "Just to prove to you that what I've got to say is a little out of the ordinary," she said, "suppose I tell you something about yourself. Suppose I tell you that I know you have a birthmark exactly like mine between your shoulder blades."

Roger raised his eyebrows.

"Surprises you, doesn't it? And I haven't been hiding behind a door peeking into your shower, either."

Roger frowned. "What goes on here? What's this all about? Who are you anyway, Martha McLeod?"

The waiter came with their drinks and Martha sipped hers and kept smiling in that slow, puzzling way. It was beginning to annoy Roger a little. She said, "Let's take it slow and easy now and try to believe one thing before we go on to the next."

"Let's," said Roger. He kept frowning.

She said, "I don't know what name to call Them. They call themselves—well, people. They come from a solar system that we haven't even recorded yet. Their thought-name for it could be translated as Akkan, I guess. You'll probably have your own image and your own sound when you hear it."

"What in blazes," said Roger, staring, "are you talking about? This makes no sense—"

"Relax," she said. "Let me talk, and don't interrupt. It'll get clearer after a while."

"All right, go ahead," said Roger doubtfully.

She sipped her drink again. To Roger it all seemed like a crazy dream, especially in this unreal bluish lighting and with the monsters and babes in the murals skipping around the walls. He felt a little dizzy—and he hadn't even touched his own drink yet. Martha kept looking at him steadily. "You were born in a remote place, weren't you?"

He nodded. "Cabin in Arizona. How did you know?"

"Everybody who has the spear-shaped birthmark was. I was born on a farm one winter when everything was snowed in. No doctor—nobody. In other words, no witnesses."

"No witnesses to what?"

She said, "Let's take it from the beginning. Here we are in the twenty-first century and man—earth man, that is—has accomplished certain things. We travel in space. Not easily, yet, and not very far—the moon has been our practical limit in spite of the two expeditions to Mars. We finally managed to come to a World State after the last very terrible war. That had to happen before we could be ready to really go out into space. Out beyond our own solar system. From

what I've managed to find out we're ready now to travel faster than light, and technically that's the first step."

ROGER thought momentarily of his mission the next day, but didn't say anything.

She went on. "We are being watched here on earth," she said very slowly and carefully now. "We've been watched for nearly a century. There are eyes in space and they've been watching us."

"That theory's been suggested before," said Roger, "but nobody's ever proved it as fact—"

"It's fact, all right," said Martha. "You'll know it before this night's over. You may wish you didn't."

"Keep talking," Roger said.

"Earth man," said Martha, "has some pretty bad habits. He tends to destroy whatever he finds—he's using up his own planet at a terrible rate right now. He tends to stir up hate and conflict and discontent wherever he goes. He's never satisfied with an equilibrium. This, of course, is a potential danger to the Akkans. They live all over space; they've colonized hundreds of planets. The day earth-man goes beyond his own solar system he has taken the first step toward discovering the Akkans."

"Are you making all this up?" said Roger, tilting his head to one side.

She said, "You don't have to take my word for it. Come with me, now, and in a hour you'll be in contact with the Akkans yourself."

"What are you trying to pull? Is this a trap of some kind?"

Her smile widened. "Afraid?"

"I don't know," said Roger thoughtfully. Then he stood up suddenly and said, "Let's go."

THEY drove to her apartment and on the way out she leaned against

the cushions, letting her blonde hair spread out in the breeze and looking quietly at the stars. She wouldn't say anything more for the moment. They entered her place and she turned the lights on and told Roger to sit on the couch. He did. He kept watching her—half suspiciously. She went to the closet and came out again with a gadget that looked like a black cigarette box with a polished steel mirror attached to it. It had a small prismatic window and an electric cord. She set it on the coffee table before the couch and plugged it in.

"What the devil is it?" asked Roger.

Her thin, enigmatic smile again. "Standard equipment for a psychiatrist," she said. "The mirror revolves, making a blinking effect, and it induces hypnosis."

"Hypnosis?"

"It's the only way you can get in contact with them. With the subconscious stripped. Unless you're gifted with high e.s.p."

"You mean to say you're going to hypnotize me?"

She nodded. "I'll need your cooperation, of course."

He got up. "Look, I don't like this. I don't like this one bit. How do I know you're not pulling a fast one?"

"You don't," she said flatly. "But if you want to know why both of us have the same kind of birthmark and why both of us were born in remote places, unattended, and if you want to know the answers to all the strange things that have happened, you'll do it. There's no other way. I was contacted in the same way that you're being contacted now. And remember that I'm taking a chance in trusting you, too."

Roger sat down again suddenly. "I should have my head examined," he said, "but go ahead."

She dimmed the lights. She plugged

the machine in and told Roger to lie down on the couch, and then she turned the baleful, steadily blinking light toward him. He heard her low, throaty voice coming out of the liquid darkness beyond the light. "Lie back...relax now...rest...rest your arms and legs...rest as if you were floating...that's it...now your eyes are sleepy...your eyelids are getting heavy..."

Roger fought it, at first. The excitement in his chest and stomach wouldn't allow him to concentrate right away. But presently the monotony of the blinking light and the steady, soothing sound of the girl's voice began to seep into his mind. He felt a kind of pleasant numbness in his skull.

"Sleepy...close your eyes..."

Her voice was coming now as if out of space itself. The blinking light appeared to recede. He began to hear a kind of sustained and soft-voiced rush of air in his ears. The room seemed at once to swell to gigantic size and move further from him. He was not moving, yet he was filled with the feeling and essence of motion.

It was not at all like unconsciousness. He was aware, perfectly aware of himself and the fact of his existence and the fact of a cosmos about him. Yet there was feeling; there was no registering of the senses as he knew it in a wakeful state. There was time, but it seemed not to matter; he couldn't tell how much or how little time there was—his time sense was out of focus, that was it.

AND NOW there was a voice that spoke, but not in words. It was pure thought, this thing that came into Roger's awareness. It was thought stripped of word and voice, and yet it had a definite personality. It was something grave and strong and ma-

ture, vastly mature.

"Can you sense me now, Roger?"

"Yes." To his surprise Roger found that he could answer the same way.

"Good. We should have contacted you before. But there was so much to do. And there were all the others. And now you've much to learn. First, we are the Akkans. The name is meaningless, but it is at least a label and it will help you to think of us. We are in space, but near earth. It doesn't matter where. Nor does my name matter; it's enough to say that I command the group that has been assigned to earth. The most important thing for you to know, Roger, is that *you are one of us.*"

There was a pause. Roger thought: "I am one of you?"

"You are an Akkan," the implacable thought-voice went on. "You look like an earth man, but you are an Akkan. I cannot describe to you how an Akkan looks, because an Akkan looks like nothing you have ever seen. That is why the first of us who came to earth had to stay hidden. It would have alarmed earth men; it would have made them afraid as something unknown always does and they would have outdone themselves to bring destruction to us. That is their way. We don't hate them, because we have no hate—but they must be kept within certain bounds."

"But—how can I be an Akkan?"

"We made you into the form of an earth man. A difficult job and it took us many years to learn how to do it. We developed the spear-shaped birthmark between the shoulder blades so that Akkans would recognize each other. We watched carefully and when we found a child about to be born in a remote place we substituted one of our own life creations. The children we took were always taken care of; we found places for them."

"I still don't understand. Why haven't I known this before?"

"Each Akkan has to be contacted separately. Sometimes it happens by accident, as when an Akkan is going under an anesthetic. But generally Akkans must seek out each other. When Martha contacted us through self-hypnosis she mentioned you and we remembered you. We have records. She was told to arrange your contact."

There was another pause and it seemed to Roger that he was alone and independent in space and that the cosmos swirled around him.

"And now this is enough for the first contact," said the thought-voice. "There will be more. Later, we will tell you how to work for us. We have only one goal—to keep earth men in his own solar system. This may be hard for you because you think like an earth man, and they are, in effect, your people. But it will become clear to you after a while why this is the best thing for both us, and earth men, and all the peoples of the universe."

"How do you know that I'll be loyal to you? How do you know I won't expose the whole thing?"

In the thought-voice there was the sense of a smile. "We don't know. Not all Akkans agree with our way of thinking—some are too strongly conditioned, and too emotionally tied to the earth men they resemble. But we do have one thing in our favor, and that is earth man's refusal to believe what he can't understand and explain. You cannot possibly give us away. The last Akkan who tried desperately to do that is now in a mad house. Schizophrenia with definite hallucinations, they call it."

The thought-voice faded and again there was the sense of motion, but this time Roger seemed to be rushing toward something rather than away. His ordinary senses began to

return. Presently out of the swirling nothingness he saw a pin-point of light, and then the pin-point grew, coming toward him; it swelled and then there was light all around him, and suddenly he saw that he was in the living room of Martha's apartment. He was still on the couch, and the lights were on now, and he was sitting up straight, half-startled, blinking his eyes.

MARTHA was standing there a few feet from him, looking down at him and smiling.

He shook his head; he shook some of the faint daze away.

Martha said, "You spoke with them?"

"It—it wasn't a dream? It wasn't something you put into my mind?"

"It's quite real. It's all quite real," said Martha. "You'll run into other Akkans, now. Of course you have to be very careful, because not all of them have been in contact. But you'll see as time goes on that it's very real."

Roger swung his feet to the floor and said, "I need a cigarette."

She gave him one.

He puffed thoughtfully for a moment and said, "I could do with a drink, too."

She found a bottle and a shot glass and he took two of them, neat, one right after the other.

Martha smiled and said, "That's exactly how I felt after my first contact. It shocks you at first to learn that you're not really like the rest of the people on earth—that you're humanoid, but not human, so to speak—but you get over it."

"I—I can't think straight," said Roger, gesturing helplessly: "I'm mixed up as hell inside."

"Of course you are," said Martha. "It will be some time before you can feel any loyalty to Akkan. You're

still emotionally tied to earth."

"But—but I am an earth man," he said. "In mind and body. Practically, pragmatically—whatever you want to call it. If I'm an Akkan, why don't I feel different?"

"Your sense of identity will come to you in time," said Martha. "You have to get over this first shock of the thing, and then develop slowly through the contacts. It will change your way of thinking. You'll work with them, and report to them the way I do."

He got up. "Dammit, it's—it's spying! It's treason! How can I feel that it's anything else?"

"Spying and treason," she said, "assumes the existence of an enemy. Akkan is not an enemy. By keeping earth man in his own solar system Akkan acts as a friend. It is best for earth men—best for the universe."

"I—I don't see it. I can't see it that way." He paced. "I don't know what to think."

She stepped in front of him suddenly, halting his pacing. She looked up at him, held him with her violet eyes. Her broad lips parted just a little and her shoulders went back and her lithe body trembled just a little, and then abruptly he grabbed her and pulled her to him. He bent his lips to hers. Those broad lips were warm and faintly moist and they clung. Her body melted into the curve of his own and he felt it there, alive and trembling.

This could keep him from thinking. This could keep him from thinking the terrible thoughts...

AND THEN suddenly they broke apart. Suddenly they were standing there staring into each other's eyes in a strange, puzzled way.

"Martha," said Roger quietly, "something's happened."

She nodded. "Yes. Something's happened."

"That—that kiss was more than either of us meant it to be."

She nodded again. Tightly.

He took her arms above the elbows and gripped her and held her there. "We're in love, Martha—do you see what that means?"

"I—I don't know. I feel very strange. Now I'm the one who's mixed up."

"We're human, Martha. We're earth people. In spite of everything—in spite of Akkan—that's what we are. We're a man and woman who have fallen in love. That means we belong to earth. We can't work against it. It's not really in us to do that—"

Martha said, "I don't know. I don't know."

He dropped his hands again. "The Akkans, Martha—the group that watches earth. Where are they?"

She lifted her eyes. "Why? What—are you thinking of doing?"

"Listen to me, Martha. They may be right about earth man—it may be that earth man destroys whatever he finds. But I can't believe that this will always be true. Maybe when we do get out of the solar system we'll grow and mature. We can't let Akkan stop us from that. They've no right to sit in judgement on us like that—no beings have that right with any other beings, no matter how superior or how much more intelligent they are. I don't know how or why I know this, but because I do know it I'm an earthman, even if I wasn't actually born one. Where are they, Martha? Where are the ones I just spoke to?"

He saw her eyes widen and he saw the understanding blossom in them, and he knew then that she would tell him.

CHAPTER V

THE XX-13 streaked through space.

Rocket Leader Roger Leigh sat in the close, one-man cockpit hemmed in by instruments and recording devices. He kept his eyes on the viewplate before him which showed the outside in a three-dimensional effect so that it was little different from actually looking through a window. There was no sense of the spin imparted to the ship which held him in his seat by centrifugal force and created an artificial gravity.

He watched the relative speed indicator. It was showing Einstein point seven five—three-quarters of the speed of light—and the thrust indicator was still climbing steadily. The directional meter was showing a two degree orbital tendency.

A familiar voice crackled in Roger's headsets. "How's it going, kid? Everything still okay?"

"I've never felt better in my life, General," Roger answered.

"We've got you cross-tracked now," Kerrigan answered across space. "You're deviating. What's your orbital tendency?"

"Two degrees," reported Roger.

"Well, you're off at least five. Don't your instruments show it?"

Roger smiled to himself and said, "I'm taking a different route, General."

Kerrigan's voice made a slow explosion. "What do you mean, a different route? What's the matter—you suddenly get space happy, or something?"

"Nope," said Roger, "I never felt better or saner in my life."

"Then get the devil back on course!" roared the General.

The relative speed needle kept on in a quivering climb. It was at Ein-

stein point eight five now.

Roger said, "Listen good, General—and everybody else. I've only got a couple of minutes left. I'll give you a quick outline of what I've got to say and you can sniff out the details when you have time. If you'll plot my curve you'll see I'm headed for Mars. There are things—beings—I don't know what they are—on Mars. They're the lads Task Commander Cardenas saw in 2012. Dr. Ling-Tao caught some of their mental emanations in Theophilis crater. And there've been other indications. Anyway, they come from way out—they're scattered through space. This little bunch on Mars is there to see that no earth man gets beyond the solar system. I could have reported all this before I took off, but I couldn't have proved it, and I couldn't have made you believe me. Maybe this way will do it. You can get all the details from Martha McLeod, General—Space Officer Bell knows where to get in touch with her. The important thing is that you see what I'm doing here, and then believe her."

"You crazy fool—what are you doing?" Kerrigan's voice this time sounded just a little shaky—

"I know exactly where they are, General," said Roger, "and I'm ramming Mars. You ought to be able to see the explosion on your screens."

The General probably roared again. Undoubtedly the General roared. But Roger didn't hear it: he had switched his communicator off.

The edge of Mars began to show in his viewplate. It grew fat, filling the frame. The needle was now just under the speed of light.

It was a matter of seconds, now. In seconds he'd find out what happens—or what doesn't happen—when a man dies. He had the passing idea that maybe the whole thing was illusion, and that he was indeed mad

and had imagined the thought-voice he'd heard in Martha's apartment the night before. Or even that Martha had tricked him and made him imagine it, although he could see no reason why she would—

At that moment the thought-voice came into his brain again. It was even stronger and clearer than it had been the last time. That was probably because he was nearer to it—that would also explain why Ling-Tao had caught emanations on the moon.

"You win, Roger. We have gone."

THAT WAS all he sensed—there was no time for more. The relative speed needle was suddenly on Einstein One. Roger felt suddenly a terrible vibration and heard a high, unearthly singing scream that seemed to come from everywhere at once. The image in the viewplate swirled before his eyes. Gripping, unbearable pain came over him; it was in every nerve, every cell of his body. He heard wild laughter—an instant later he realized it was his own.

He couldn't tell how long these things lasted, again, as in his hypnosis, there was no sense of time.

Then, abruptly, the sensations were gone. He saw that he was still in the cockpit and that his hand was on the thrust valve and orbital brake. He must have done that automatically. There was only black space dotted by the baleful eyes of distant suns in his viewplate now. He checked his position instruments swiftly. He was beyond Mars—he hadn't rammed—he had missed, somehow.

He turned the communicator on again.

Kerrigan was still roaring. "Leigh! Roger Leigh! Can you hear me? Come in, Roger—"

"I'm here," Roger said.

There was the sound of a hard and definite sigh of relief. "Kid, I'm glad to hear your voice. How do you feel? Better? Those crazy ideas of yours gone, now?"

Roger knew suddenly that they'd never believe his story. Space madness, they'd say—just a touch of space madness. They'd give him a medal and in the citation they'd point out how, among other things, he had undergone a terrible moment, or two of space madness. Maybe it was better that way. Maybe it was better if they never knew, and even if he and Martha could somehow pretend to themselves that they were true earth peo-

ple. Roger said, "I'm okay now, General."

"Good," answered Kerrigan. "We thought it had killed you when she hit the speed of light. She glowed like a comet and bucked right out of the screens. Brake her down, Roger, and orbit back in. You had a narrow escape: you'd have rammed Mars if she hadn't bucked like that."

"Okay," said Roger, "I'm coming in."

He leaned back. He was tired. He was an old man of twenty-seven and he was tired. Right now all he wanted out of life was to get to earth and stay there—among his own kind.

SATELLITE GREED

BY WILLIAM KARNEY

BILL NELSON stared for a long while at the empty metal box. The lid was up and where seven kilos of glittering, sparkling flamestones should have been, was emptiness!

Bill Nelson sat down heavily at the compact astrogating table in the little space-boat and held his head in his hands. The arduous, back-breaking labor of four months was wasted—all his plans gone and vanished—into thin space.

He should have known, he thought, that there was something wrong about Blake. It was easy to see why Blake had insisted on their working alone, it was clear why Blake had been "at work" on his lode for such a long time and at such odd intervals. The sly devil must have cached a space-boat somewhere, hidden it thoroughly in the billion and one crevices which dotted the surface of Luna—and then struck. Why had he been such a trusting fool!

By now, Nelson thought, Blake will be well on his way to Careen or another of the major lunar dome-cities, and then in a few hours, safely bound for Earth.

For a long time, Bill struggled in his mind, tempted to forget working the lode which still had rather rich deposits, and go after Blake with all he had. But reason took command. Catching the faithless partner was hopeless. The main thing was to get to work.

Wearily, reluctantly, Bill climbed into a space-suit, went through the lock of the little space-boat and started off across the gritty pumice-surface. The thought suddenly struck him—at least see where Blake cached the second space-boat.

After a good hour's work, Bill stumbled on a canyon-like crevice. He rounded a huge layer of jutting rocky formation—and then saw it! Perched unmoving, well-

hidden from above, was a small powerful type-L106 "flitter", its rockets silent. Bill drew a blaster from his capacious suit and made his way slowly and cautiously toward the space-boat, taking advantage of every out-cropping to protect himself.

But no motion was apparent. If Blake was in the ship, he was mighty slow about moving. Bill keyed the lock and went in slowly. There was not a sign of the errant partner.

Puzzled, he left the little vessel and started to search the surrounding terrain. Then he came upon Blake!

Blake would never play the treacherous partner again. His body, clad in its bulky space-suit, lay sprawled out on a little pumice rise. A hundred feet behind it lay the bag of flame-stones. Blake's blaster was in his hand, and the right foot of the space-suit was a gaping hole.

Bill studied the scene carefully. It was easy to reconstruct the event. Blake had gotten his foot caught in a crevice, lined with razor-sharp stone. The tough fabric of the suit hadn't given before his violent struggle. In his mind's eye, Bill saw the desperate man, thinking of how he had to get away, struggling furiously to disengage his foot. Finally, failing to break loose, he must have decided to chance a blast shot at the rock. He succeeded all right—but he nipped the suit in the process. Despite the loss of air, he must have made a powerful struggle to cover the hundred odd feet to the shelter of the air-lock. But a man in an empty space-suit, struggling in a vacuum, doesn't get far...

Bill carried the dead-weight of Blake's body to the boat. But he was strangely sober. It is not easy to be over-joyed at knowing how a man dies in a vacuum...

* * *

The MAN WITH COMMON SENSE

**In a world where strong men hatched
evil plots, Malachi Jones proved that the
most uncommon weapon is common sense . . .**



"Speak up, bub," the deep voice growled. "Wha'cha snoopin' around here for?"



By Edwin James

"Common sense," Malachi Jones once said, "may be defined as the quality lacking in women and stories of adventure."

THE SALOON was raffishly romantic—a crazy quilt of crude makeshifts and glitteringly improbable extravagance. Above, a ceiling of frosted glass glowed with shifting multi-colored flames, lending a rapid succession of expressions to the rough, blackened, stubbled faces of the boisterous crowd. Beneath their heavy, impatient feet the sand scuffled into little heaps and drifts of the pitted concrete floor.

The weathered sign outside read: Dirty John's Palace of Pleasure and Grill. And beneath that: The best

blasted Sar steak on Mizar II. With one notable exception, however, the throng within was bent more on other pleasures than the culinary, and the waiters bobbed and weaved swiftly with laden trays of raw, throat-stinging liquor.

Dirty John solicitously bent low over his best table and inquired of the one incongruous note in the explosively turbulent room if the Sar steak was done to satisfaction.

The dapper, wizened little man with the thin graying hair raised his gaze from the hewn boards of the table that came up almost to his chest and, chewing with the slow meditation of the connoisseur, nodded reflectively.

A preposterously self-satisfied expression spread over Dirty John's smashed roughneck features. His huge scarred hands fluttered.

"The minute you come in I tells myself that there's a man who knows what he's eating, and when you ask for the charcoal grill instead of the radiation I knew for sure. Give these space bums and sod busters a few drinks"—he swept his arm in a wide disdainful arc around the room—"and they'll eat swill a Venusian swamp dog would turn up his nose at."

"Common sense," said the little man soberly, dabbing at a minute spot of grease on his conservative business suit that fought a losing battle with the universal time-blackened space leathers and mud-spattered overalls, "common sense says that the best cook is the fattest cook."

All three hundred pounds of Dirty John's massive bulk shook with laughter.

"Common sense," he roared. "By all the perils of space, that's what this misbegotten planet needs—common sense!"

"And good food," the middle-aged little fellow said before he began to chew on another dripping chunk of

"the best blasted Sar steak."

Dirty John's face darkened abruptly. He gave the table a vicious swipe with the filthy rag in his hand.

"Yeah," he said.

There was no answer to that, and the little man made none. It was just as well, for the lights from overhead slowly began to cease their restless play, and a relative darkness settled over all of Dirty John's establishment except a small area cleared at the end farthest from the door. There, the stained lights began to play a swirl of color that kept eerie time to a steady throb of sensual music.

The room was almost silent for a moment before a hundred booted feet took up the beat and reinforced it to a compelling rhythm. Almost as if against its will, a weaving, sinuous figure was drawn into the fringes of the changing lights. Like a bird around a snake, it revolved in slowly decreasing spirals until, at the moment of entering the center of the area, the figure froze, feet together, arms thrown back, face lifted with closed eyes toward the source of the eddying spectrum.

The little man in the booth looked up from his meal to gaze on the spectacle. The figure was a woman, slim but well-rounded in the proper places as approved by current fashion, clothed just enough to enhance and not enough to conceal. The sudden silence was evidence of the audience's sincere admiration.

At that moment the outside door was flung open and a tall, lean, broad-shouldered young man swayed in the opening. His eyes dazedly took in the picture of the room without comprehension.

"Help!" he said hoarsely. "She's been kidnapped!"

A FEW SHAGGY heads swiveled momentarily in his direction. A few hands made threatening gestures.

The young man staggered on into the room.

"Help....!" he began again.

A few throats made menacing rumbling noises, and the crook of a cane deftly caught him by a trouser loop and pulled him to a thumping sitting position in a booth.

"Common sense," said a low, quiet voice beside him, "says that anyone who gets between hungry men and their food is likely to be eaten. Have a bite?"

The little man pointed at the remnants of the Sar steak. The newcomer's eyes slowly focused on the meat, now lit by flickering shadows of purple and ochre. He shuddered and shook his head.

The other shrugged and speared a livid piece.

"Food," he said, "is one of the few pleasures that lasts a lifetime."

The young man gradually became aware of his neighbor, and his gaze flickered in amazement from the soft-leather shoes dangling over the side of the bench to the cane and old-fashioned derby hat resting beside him and finally to the lean, incisive face with the innocent blue eyes.

"Who in the galaxy," he said blankly, "are you?"

Silently the little man extracted a leather case from his pocket, removed a card and laid it on the table. The young man peered at it until a brighter reflection lit it up. It read:

LAIRDS OF LUNA.

"We insure anything"

Malachi Jones

The young man stared at the card with a puzzled expression on his face.

"What....!" he began in a loud voice.

"Sh-h-h," Malachi said, as a number of faces turned angrily in their direction.

He pointed in the direction of the dance. The music had risen to a peak of emotion and the dancer was beginning to shiver as if with excitement. Slowly driven by the insistent rhythm, she moved from her rigid pose, then faster and faster until she abandoned herself to the seducing beat.

The dance and music were frankly sensual, appealing to each woman-starved man there according to his own desires. The emotion was pervasive, and the tense excitement of the room rose steadily in a palpable wave.

The young man gazed for a moment at the sense-enthraling sight of the woman's lithely-moving figure caressed and transformed by flickering fingers of light, and he buried his face in his hands, sobbing.

"Horrible! Horrible!"

No one was annoyed this time; no one had any sight or hearing left for anything except what was happening before him.

"The sexual element," Malachi said judiciously, "has been found to be the basis for all art forms."

MALACHI looked at the back of the young man's head. A lump the size of an egg was swelling behind his right ear.

"You were saying something about a girl when you came in?" he asked politely.

The young man looked up with bloodshot eyes.

"She's gone," he said brokenly. "The rebels got her—not far from here. She asked me to escort her from the ship. She's gone. And I'm here in this place—when I should be trying to rescue her!"

"My dear boy," Malachi said mildly, "all adventures start in low dives like this. Adventure fiction has made it obligatory. But who is the young woman?"

The other's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"How do I know you aren't one of them?"

Malachi pointed at the card.

"I'm an agent for Lairds of Luna. We insure anything," he said. "What is more, I just arrived on Mizar II on the same ship as yourself—and the young woman, too, I imagine. She is, I presume, an employee of the Bureau of Extra-Solar Affairs?"

"How did you know?" the other blurted out.

"Common sense," said Malachi, "says that a young woman arriving on Mizar II is either a prospective settler's wife or a government agent. Your interest in the young woman disposes of the former possibility."

The young man broke down.

"You're right," he said. "And I'm Rand Ridgeway, second mate of the Quest. And now I've made a mess of things, and if the Bureau ever finds out one of their agents has been touched there'll be war for sure."

"Hm-m-m," Malachi mused as he finished the last of his steak.

Rand started to get up impatiently, but Malachi carelessly reached up with his cane and pulled him back down, gesturing toward the entertainment. It was reaching a climax, the dancer beaded with perspiration and beginning to slow her movements in time with the music. Every languid motion seemed to suggest that she was on the verge of surrender to passion. The pulsing emotions of a hundred men rose to a frenzy.

Somewhere in front a huge, barrel-chested man rose to his feet and belled like a bull. He started blindly forward toward the cleared space and the music stopped, the dancer cowering back, panting from her exertions.

Someone—it may have been a waiter—tripped the man, and he sprawled on his face in the sand. When he got

up, Dirty John, moving swiftly for a man of his size, put a fist in his face. A mutter arose from the crowd, and the heightened emotions that had been passion turned to something else. A scuffle started near the door, and men turned to stare at it.

"Common sense," Malachi said cheerfully, "says that when a woman is shared by a hundred men she can belong to none of them. Also, I see that our exit is obstructed.

"Here," he said, handing Rand the heavy plate on which the Sar steak had rested, "see how far you can throw it."

Rand looked at him without understanding for a moment, then turned, shrugged, and heaved it far down the room. It shattered against the hard head of a burly rocketeer, and he roared with pain and anger. Turning quickly, he struck the man behind him who staggered back, knocking over tables and men like dominoes. Soon there was a knot of flailing arms. The fight spread like panic.

Malachi got slowly up, settled his derby on his head at a rakish angle, draped his cane over his arm, and left the booth. Rand stared after him for a moment, irresolutely, then back at the clotted mob and the terrified dancer beyond. He plunged into the melee.

WHEN RAND finally crawled from the shattered building, his space leathers in tatters, his body and face cut and matted with blood and sand, he found Malachi waiting, dapper and debonair, comfortably propped on his cane.

"Where were you?" Rand groaned reproachfully.

"Common sense," Malachi said lightly, "says that the best place in a fight is outside."

Rand groaned, shook his head, and staggered to his feet.

"What in the galaxy are you doing here anyway?"

"Representing my company, Lairds of Luna, 'We insure anything,'" Malachi said, as if that explained everything. "Surely you've heard of Lairds."

"Of course," Rand said, groaning. "You may sell a lot of insurance, too, but you'll never get rich on Mizar II. The death rate is higher here than it is in space service, from fights and accidents in trying to make Mizar II a possible place to live."

"Oh, I'm not a salesman," Malachi said. "I'm an agent who sees that our customers get good value for their money. And a month ago one of them took out a policy insuring the peace of Mizar II."

"In that case Lairds had better be prepared to pay through the nose," Rand said gloomily. "The settlers and workers here are going to revolt in a week. I just hope the Quest clears before it breaks out. If we can find Sandra—Mr. Johnson."

"I know," Malachi said. "But Lairds always give value for its money. If an insurer is sick, Lairds provides the best doctor. Mr. Gordon Brown paid for peace, and Lairds is going to see that he gets it."

Rand looked up in surprise at the name—a movement that made him wince with pain.

"But he's one of the rebel leaders!"

Malachi didn't seem surprised. A man reeled out of the saloon between them, holding his head gingerly as if he were afraid of losing it.

"Perhaps we should find a more secluded place to talk," Malachi said. "If we are going to preserve peace, we must make plans."

A small moon was shedding an indifferent light on the crude space port and the cruder buildings surrounding it. Not far down the rutted trail that led to the nearest village, Malachi and Rand drew themselves into the

scraggly, omnipresent brush. Malachi removed his derby, brushed it with the sleeve of his coat, and placed it carefully on the ground beside him. Rand settled himself with a muffled groan.

"As I understand it," Malachi began, "the settlers are unsatisfied with the way the Bureau has been treating them."

"You know how it is," said Rand. "A lot of promises were made to get them out here—ten years ago, some of them—and they find it's hard work, not enough supplies, and few women. I suppose people back home forget and get tired of sending supplies and machinery for no observable results."

"Common sense," mused Malachi, "says that revolution is useless when it cannot gain the fruits of victory."

"Eh?" said Rand. "What do you mean by that?"

"When a colony is still dependent on the home planet, revolution is worse than futile, it is stupid."

"That may be true," Rand said, "but what are the poor fellows going to do? To tell you the truth, I don't really care, anyway. If Sandra weren't in their hands, I'd be on the ship by now—sleeping or eating. I wish you had brought along some of that steak."

"I did," Malachi said, drawing a large package out of his right pocket. "When I told Dirty John I was planning on taking a walk, he insisted on fixing me a lunch. A very obliging fellow, really. And the best cook this side of Canopus." Malachi sighed. "That steak was a masterpiece."

"Never mind the advertising," Rand said. "Give me the food."

RAND TORE at the wrappings and groaning with mingled pain and hunger started to gnaw a huge hunk off the steak within. As suddenly he stopped, his teeth just about to bite into the tender, juicy meat.

"What am I doing?" he said bitterly. "How can I think of food when Sandra is imprisoned somewhere, starving, probably!"

He tossed the steak away.

"Even heroes and lovers must eat," Malachi said. "A point often overlooked by authors."

Rand scrambled after the steak, brushed it off carefully, and bit into it quickly, before any compunctions might again strike him.

"You're right," he said.

Malachi watched him with gentle eyes.

"Wait till the boys at the office hear about me eating Sar steak," he said. "By the way, what is a Sar?"

"It's a large, carnivore native to Mizar II," Rand said carelessly.

Malachi jumped up hastily and peered nervously into the brush.

"You needn't worry," Rand said. "They seldom attack men."

"Common sense," said Malachi with a quaver in his voice which he suppressed with difficulty, "says that a man who enjoys food as much as I do can appreciate best the emotions of a carnivore."

"The important thing," Rand said, waving a slab of meat in the air, "is what are we going to do about our mutual problems. How are we going to find Sandra and release her?"

Malachi slowly resumed his seat and settled his chin in his palm.

"That, as you say," he said at last, "is the problem."

They thought about it for awhile, Rand chewing noisily on the product of Dirty John's proud cuisine.

Finally Malachi broke the silence.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to find the headquarters of the rebels and—or the place Miss Johnson is being held prisoner."

"Fat chance," said Rand. "We might as well go back to the ship for reinforcements."

"No," said Malachi with determination. "If we let any more people know about it, war will be a certainty. The Bureau could never let Miss Johnson's abduction pass by if it became public knowledge. Besides, I have reinforcements."

He pulled a large flask from his left pocket.

"Another of Dirty John's gifts."

The flask passed back and forth several times before anything more was said.

"Sh-h-h," Malachi said. "Do you hear anything?"

"Only your voice," Rand said.

"Sh-h-h," Malachi cautioned again.

Finally the sound was plain. A number of men were walking along the road, quietly.

"Who," Malachi whispered, "could be walking soberly along this road at this time of night?"

Rand shrugged and then looked up.

"Rebels," he said. "Going to a meeting."

Malachi nodded.

"In stories," Rand said eagerly, "they always waylay one of them and force the information out of him."

Malachi shook his head and enumerated his objections briefly in a low tone: "Take too long—too much noise—unethical."

"What a time to worry about ethics," Rand said.

Malachi raised a finger. He got up, carefully brushed himself off, picked up his derby and placed it on his head, picked up his cane and hung it over his arm, and motioned Rand to join him. He beckoned Rand's ear close to his lips.

"Common sense," he whispered, "says that when you don't know where you're going and you don't want to ask, the best thing to do is to follow someone who's going there."

And they did.

"**H**OW LONG is this thing going to continue?" Rand whispered, groaning softly.

They had been following the steady tread of feet for almost an hour.

"Sh-h-h," shushed Malachi. "Do you want to bring the lot of them down on us?"

"My feet hurt," Rand complained. "They never have to worry about things like that in stories."

Malachi handed him the flask.

"They say alcohol is good for injuries," Rand said complacently, tilting the container.

"That's on the outside," Malachi said bitterly. "If I had known you were going to use them as an excuse all night, I wouldn't have left Dirty John's so soon. You've had three drinks to my one."

They tramped on through the night until Malachi stopped abruptly, silenced Rand, and cocked his head to one side.

"Do you hear anything?" he said finally.

"No," Rand said.

"I don't either," Malachi said. "There's nobody ahead of us any more."

"Good," Rand said, sat down at the edge of the road, removed his left shoe, and dumped a large rock and several pounds of sand out of it.

"They must have turned off somewhere," Malachi said thoughtfully.

Somewhere nearby a loud roar split the night.

"What's that?" Malachi said nervously.

"A Sar," Rand said. He had now removed his right shoe.

Malachi cleared his throat. "Let us," he said eagerly, "—let us retrace our steps."

They had walked several hundred yards when Rand gave an exclamation of pain.

"What's the matter?" Malachi asked in a startled tone.

"The rocks hurt my feet," Rand said. "I forgot my shoes."

Malachi sighed. "Go back and see if you can find them."

There was a silence of about fifteen minutes broken by the repeated roar of the Sar, nearer this time.

"Rand!" Malachi whispered vigorously.

"Yes!" came the distant, exasperated reply. "I can't find my shoes!"

"Come on without them," Malachi urged. "We can't waste all night."

Groans and expletives marked Rand's progress down the road.

"Heroism," he moaned when he reached Malachi, "is not what it's cracked up to be."

"A much overrated occupation," Malachi agreed. "There must be a side trail here that we missed. You cover that side of the road, and I'll look on this side."

They searched for about a quarter of a mile in that fashion, Malachi with his cane thrust aggressively among the bushes at the side of the road, Rand moaning pitiably. Suddenly there was no more brush to slow Malachi's cane.

"Rand," he whispered, "there's some kind of path here."

Rand joined him and peered off into the darkness.

"It looks like there's a light down that way," he agreed.

AFTER consultation they agreed to follow the new trail. They had progressed no farther than a few feet, however, when Rand cried out and sat down heavily grabbing his foot.

"There's a trap there," he said in agony. "They must have set some knives in the path, probably poisoned. Go on, Malachi. Skirt the trap and leave me here. Rescue Sandra and save peace. All I ask is that you tell her—I loved her."

Malachi, meanwhile, had been investigating Rand's stockinged foot. His fingers gave a quick jerk. Rand winced and stifled a groan.

"Here," Malachi said, dropping an object in his palm, "here is your poisoned knife."

"It's a thorn," Rand said with disbelief.

"Common sense," Malachi said sadly, "says that a hero without shoes is worse than a hero without brains. Get up and let's get on with our business."

They walked quietly a few hundred yards along the trail without further incident. Then Rand stopped short and clutched Malachi's arm.

"What about guards?" he whispered. "They're sure to have guards."

"Why?" Malachi asked in amazement. "Who on Mizar II do they have to guard against?"

"Well," Rand said reluctantly, "it was a thought."

"They might have someone at the door to keep out anyone who isn't invited," Malachi conceded. "Maybe we should take to the brush and reconnoiter. That light doesn't look far away."

They made their way off the path, Rand stepping gingerly, and then turned once more toward the light which seemed to be coming from an unguarded window. When they had advanced fifty feet, Rand walked into a wall. It was a substantial wall of native rock, and Rand cursed vigorously but silently for ten minutes, rubbing his knee and forehead.

"This is a nice wall," Malachi whispered. "I can just reach the top with my cane. There seems to be some sort of sharp material stuck in the top."

"Here," Rand said. "Put your foot in my hand and I'll hoist you up."

Malachi turned an amazed gaze on him.

"Why would I want to do that?"

"How else are we going to get in?"

Rand asked with exasperation. "What are you going to do, go to the front door, knock, and say you're from Lairs of Luna and wouldn't they like to insure something?"

"Certainly," Malachi said. "Common sense says that the best way to get into a house is through the front door."

"Maybe you're crazy," Rand said, "but I'm not."

He began to tear strips from his already tattered space leathers and fashion them into crude bandages for his hands. Even in the dimness of the waning moon he presented a horrible appearance—his black and bleeding feet poked through the shreds of his socks, his trousers fringed to his knees, his jacket now gone to make bandages exposing his bruised and battered chest, his face puffed, cut, and scraped into a parody of humanity.

But determination was in Rand Ridgeway's every action, and his heart was light.

"Wish me luck," he said gaily at last.

"Luck," Malachi said laconically.

Rand sprang up, grabbed the top of the wall, and slowly levered himself up. With many exclamations of pain he maneuvered his body over the glass-studded top and dropped heavily to the ground below.

Malachi Jones brushed a patch of dust from his otherwise impeccable garments, adjusted the angle of his derby and, whistling softly, walked casually around to the front door.

MALACHI'S firm cane-blows on the front door echoed through the night. When the door was finally flung open, a huge, stubble-faced brute with a surly expression stood belligerently in the doorway.

"Who in this misbegotten galaxy," he said, "are you?"

Formally Malachi extended a card.

"Malachi Jones," he said cheerfully. "Agent for Lairds of Luna, 'We insure anything.'"

While the man was staring at the card in amazement, Malachi brushed past him into the room.

"Where," he said casually, "is the meeting?"

"Up those stairs..." the man began in bewilderment, then, "Where do you think you're going!"

He drew Malachi back by his coat collar and lifted him into the air like a terrier with a rat. His ugly, blood-shot eyes stared into Malachi's indignant blue ones.

"I have business," Malachi said with as much dignity as he could muster.

"Business, business," the brute snarled, shaking Malachi back and forth until his derby fell off and rolled on the floor. "Any business you have is outside."

He motioned as if he were going to throw Malachi through the doorway.

Malachi's cane thwacked solidly against the side of his skull. Malachi picked himself up, straightened his coat, rescued his derby tenderly and inspected it for damage, and stepped over the body blocking the stairs.

At the top of the steps he paused momentarily while he located the door from which came a mingled babble of voices. He walked carefully down the hall, listened at the door for a second, opened it, and stepped inside.

"What was it, Pete?" someone said, as Malachi stood blinking in the sudden light.

Then came an outburst of curses including questions of identity and parentage and directions for getting rid of the intruder. As Malachi's vision returned he saw a group of rough, angry men surrounding a large table. One of the men was starting toward him.

"Damp your jets," someone said. "I know the little guy."

Malachi located the owner of the voice. It was all three hundred pounds of Dirty John.

"Let him talk," said Dirty John. "And if anybody lays a hand on him I'll serve the misbegotten sinner for dinner tomorrow!"

"Gentlemen," said Malachi, stepping forward, "I am here representing my company, Lairds of Luna, which has, as it were, an interest in the matter under discussion here."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Lairds wishes to preserve peace on Mizar II if at all possible," Malachi said soberly.

"Well, ain't that nice of them," someone said sarcastically.

Malachi turned in the direction of the last comment.

"I assure you, sir," he said, "it may be a matter of life and death with you, but to Lairds it is a matter of dollars and cents."

The same person, a large, florid man, turned to the others angrily.

"Who cares about Lairds?" he said. "Nobody's going to help us but ourselves."

"Both statements are false," Malachi said quietly. "You are, I presume, Mr. Gordon Brown?"

The startled expression on the man's face was proof that the guess had been accurate. Malachi turned to the others.

"Mr. Brown cares enough about Lairds that he insured the peace of Mizar II with my company and stands to gain ten million dollars if revolt breaks out. As for the second statement, Lairds of Luna is prepared to offer any assistance in its power to aid in your predicament."

There was silence in the room. Several of the men turned to stare at Brown with cold eyes. Finally Dirty John cleared his throat.

"It don't cost to listen," he said. "What's the offer?"

A smile spread across Malachi's face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "common sense says that men willing to listen to reason seldom fail to find a reasonable solution."

FIFTEEN minutes later an even more battered, ragged, and bedraggled Rand Ridgeway was dragged through the door. Both his eyes were almost swollen shut, the angle of his nose seemed to be altered, and he had difficulty moving his jaw.

"We found this tramp roaming around inside the wall," one of the men escorting him said.

"He's with me," Malachi said apologetically. "He has romantic delusions."

Rand was released and he slumped into a heap against the wall beside the heap that was, while conscious, insurer Gordon Brown. When Rand once more became aware of his surroundings, Malachi was making what seemed to be the final remarks in an argument.

"But how do we know Lairds can do us any good," Dirty John objected.

"Gentlemen," Malachi chided, "the reputation of Lairds of Luna speaks for itself." His eyes got a fond, reminiscent look. "Once, I remember, Lairds preserved an empire by insuring the birth of an heir."

"But it's so—so—"

"Simple?" Malachi supplied. "Of course. All problems have a simple solution. Common-sense says that the simplest answer is the best answer."

Dirty John looked around him at the undecided faces.

"I dunno—" he began, when Malachi approached him and whispered in his ear. A look of amazement and consternation spread over his face. He glanced nervously at the other members of the group while Malachi made his way back to the spot where Rand

was just struggling to his feet.

"Maybe you're right," Dirty John said hastily.

"What did you tell him?" Rand asked in a low voice, moving his jaw stiffly.

"That I would reveal the fact that the dancer was his wife," Malachi whispered back.

"How did you know that?" Rand asked in amazement.

"I didn't," Malachi replied, "but common sense says..."

"All right, all right," Rand said. "I'll take your word for it."

Gradually, reluctantly, the men began to agree.

"Might as well give it a try," one said; and another, "What can we lose?"

Malachi seized upon the moment, advanced to the table, and drew out a paper and a pen.

"If you gentlemen will sign this document everything will be in proper order."

ONE BY ONE they affixed their signatures. One by one Malachi shook their hands and complimented them upon a wise decision. He then picked up the paper, placed it carefully in his pocket, took his hat and cane, and walked toward the door.

"But, Malachi!" Rand said plaintively. "What about Sandra?"

"Oh, yes," Malachi said, turning. "I believe you have a young woman somewhere around—a Miss Johnson. I think it would be wise to let her go."

The erstwhile rebels glanced irresolutely at one another.

"The little fellow's right," said Dirty John.

When Sandra was brought into the room, she fled into Rand's arms, made many cooing sounds of sympathy over his battered condition, and undertook to cure each cut with her lips. Rand, however, thought they might be used

for better purposes and closed them effectively with his own.

"Romance," Malachi said drily, "apparently has its own peculiar compensations. But on the other hand he doesn't know the true value of food. By the way, Dirty John, I don't suppose I could induce you to come back to Luna with me as a cook?"

Dirty John shook his head and then looked up happily.

"I can give you that recipe for Sar steak," he said. "And I'll even throw in a frozen Sar."

Malachi licked his lips. "Good," he said.

He turned once more toward the door, guiding the two young people ahead of him. He stirred the heap against the wall with one small, dainty foot.

"You might send this thing back to the port," he said. "I think Lairds

will sue for attempted fraud."

Once they were outside, Rand turned to Malachi bewilderedly.

"How did you do it?" he asked. "How did you get them to agree?"

"Simple, my boy," Malachi said, tilting his derby to a jaunty angle and giving his cane a twirl. "I simply guaranteed that Mizar II would procure sufficient supplies. Common sense says that when the cause of revolution is the fear of being cut off from the supplies of home, the answer peace makes is to insure the supplies' arrival."

"Oh," Rand said, and turned his attention to another product of the night's adventure.

"Common sense says...." Malachi began again....

But, like many wise words, these went unheard.

TWENTIETH CENTURY ARMAGEDDON

By
RAMSEY SINCLAIR

SINCE THE announcement of the practicality of the Hydrogen-Helium bomb, the speculators have been having a field day, comparing the new weapon with the old atomic bomb and citing its deadliness. Unfortunately the blase ears of the public have heard so much about super-weapons that the terrible news seems to have made much less an effect than that of the original bomb. It is as if there is a saturation point to horror, beyond which our minds will accept no further remonstrance.

Well, unfortunately, it is impossible to exaggerate the deadliness of this newest of science's Frankenstein-monsters. The equation which describes the reaction of the new bomb, which even now is undoubtedly being prepared in the laboratories of the Soviet Union as well as our own, is extraordinarily simple. It is not complicated nor difficult to understand. It reads so innocently, "four atoms of hydrogen of mass one point oh oh eight combine to give one atom of helium of mass four plus some energy in the form of radiant energy—gamma rays etc..." That's all!

But what a wealth of tragedy is concealed therein!

That expression, "plus energy" is the clue. The little bit of mass of point oh three two, when expressed in terms of Einstein's famous "E equals em see squared" sends chills up and down the back of the discerning learner.

For you must remember that millions and billions of atoms are involved so that in terms of a bomb, a sizeable chunk of matter, perhaps several pounds or more, simply disappears, and becomes heat and light and lethal radiation!

The ordinary atomic bomb is a fire-cracker, a simple little puffing trigger to the hydrogen bomb, which is now really a chunk of the sun brought to earth. It is said that the atomic bomb using uranium or plutonium will be really used to "trigger" this super-bomb.

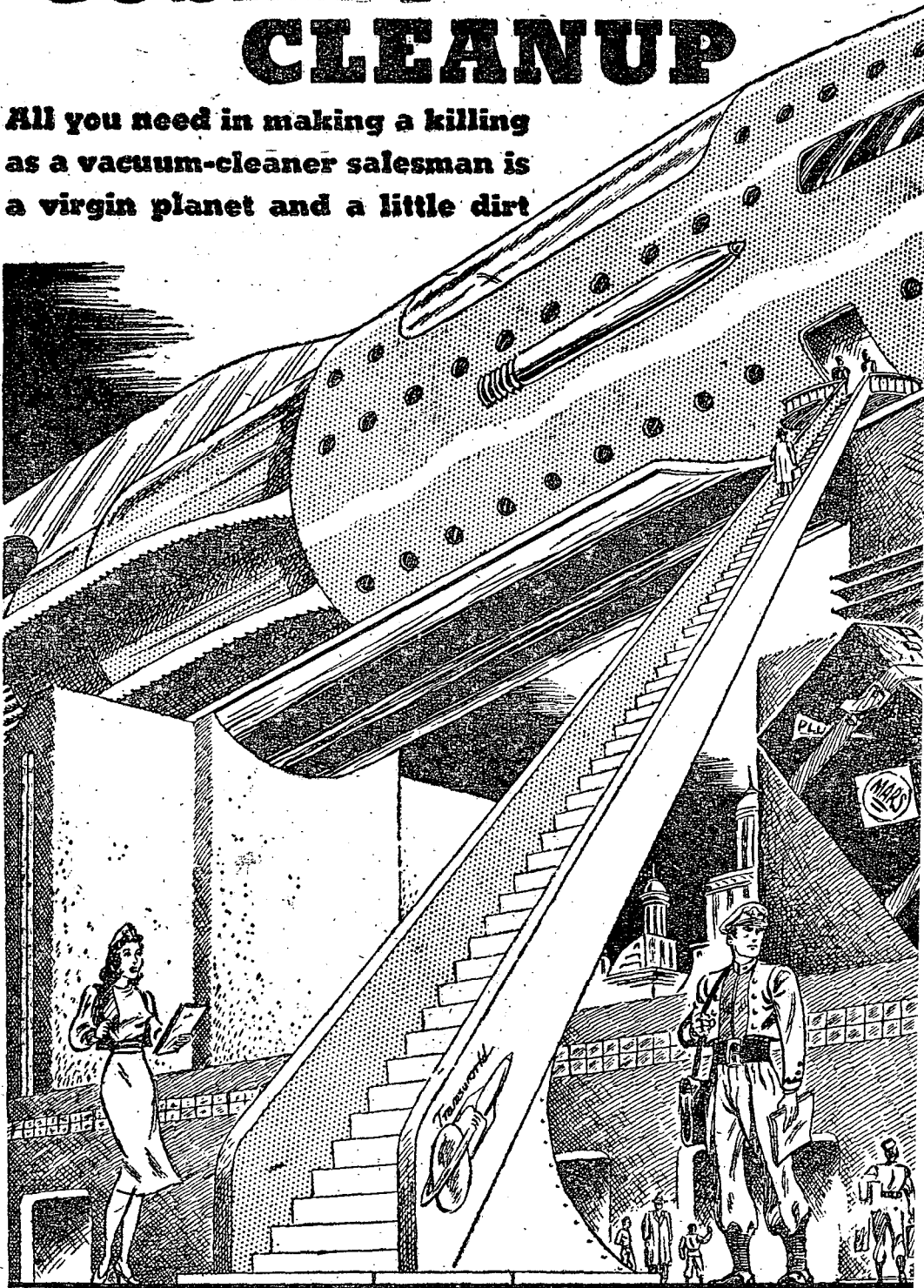
Against ultimate weapons like this, what defense is there. It seems pretty obvious. There is none. The wars in which such bombs will be used must not be allowed to come.

The remark was attributed to Einstein. Whether he said it or not is not important, but it is worthy of repeating many times: "I don't know what weapons will be used to fight the Third World War, but I do know what ones will be used in the Fourth—clubs!"

Yet the inexorable march of science cannot be slowed by forbidding the researches which lead to these ends. It must be realized that in the long run, those things which science produces and which seem like Juggernauts designed to destroy their creators, ultimately end up being the very salvation of men....

COSMIC CLEANUP

**All you need in making a killing
as a vacuum-cleaner salesman is
a virgin planet and a little dirt**



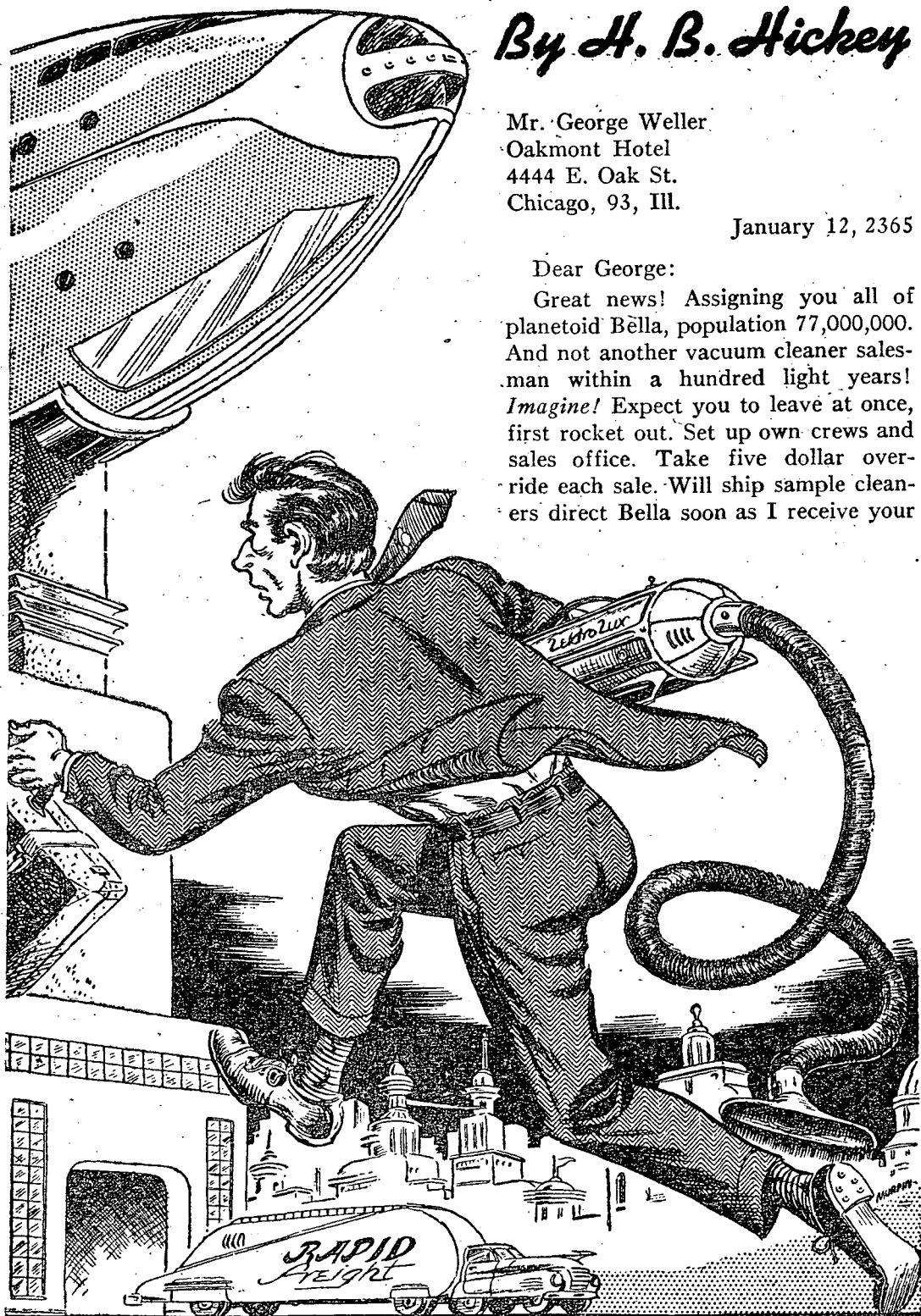
By H. B. Hickey

Mr. George Weller
Oakmont Hotel
4444 E. Oak St.
Chicago, 93, Ill.

January 12, 2365

Dear George:

Great news! Assigning you all of planetoid Bella, population 77,000,000. And not another vacuum cleaner salesman within a hundred light years! *Imagine!* Expect you to leave at once, first rocket out. Set up own crews and sales office. Take five dollar override each sale. Will ship sample cleaners direct Bella soon as I receive your



By using some fast leg-work, I managed to get aboard before they found the Prince

address. Good luck and good selling.

Coolington Wells
Sales Manager, Cleanzo Cleaners
"Gets All The Dirt!"

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N. Y.

January 12, 2365

Dear Coolie:

Great news is right! Your good judgment exceeded only by your good judgment. Packing now, leaving midnight, already called for ticket. Better get extra help to handle flood of Bellan orders.

George

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Galactic Liner *Spumo*
January 13, 2365

Dear Coolie:

Man, what a hectic day! I haven't even eaten since I got your wire. To tell the truth, I still don't know where in hell Bella is. My first thought was, they couldn't have picked a better man. Second thought, I take back everything I've ever said against you. You are *not* a sissified baboon. Some day you'll be president of this outfit and I'll be proud to be working for you.

Naturally, I was disappointed not to get the Martian territory. I can see now I was wrong in asserting you stabbed me in the back. All the while

I thought you were playing favorites by giving Mars to Gamadge, you had this up your sleeve.

Brother! 77,000,000 million customers and no competition! You're a genius, Coolie. And believe me, I'm out to prove you're the greatest vacuum field general in history. If there's anyone who can do the job, it's old George.

To get back to this Bella shuffle, though. Soon as I got your wire I went into action. Called the Chicago Interstellar Port and told them to reserve a ticket on the first ship to Bella, which turned out to be this one.

Then I started throwing my things into my bags. Packed both my samples, including extra disposable bags and a pad of Lifetime Guarantees. Then I called down for the hotel florist to send up a fresh carnation for my buttonhole. (I've always believed a big part of my success as a salesman is due to that flower in my buttonhole. People remember it.)

Well, just as I'm set to go, the spaceport calls. All seats taken. That hit me, boy! That hit me. Here I was, all primed, and the fuse goes out.

Anybody else but Weller it would have been a letdown. But not me. I grabbed a hack and zoomed out to the port. They found out who they were dealing with, believe me.

Unfortunately, it didn't mean a thing. The last two seats had been taken by a Bellan prince and princess, and naturally the company didn't want to do anything to offend them, not even for me.

WE HAD some words, the traffic manager and I. I tried to calm him by giving him a glimpse of some lettuce I had folded in my palm, and it made him pretty sore. Matter of fact, he was going to put me on a blacklist so I'd never be able to book

passage if I lived to be a thousand. His exact words, I believe.

Things got hot then. For myself, I wouldn't have cared, Coolie. But after all I was battling then for you and Cleanzo too. Anyway, it wound up with the t.m. taking a poke at me. I had to hang one on his chin, finally, and it was as lovely a right as ever was thrown, if I do say so myself.

Well, it would have been enough to discourage anyone. After I'd picked myself up outside the main gates and got my luggage and the cleaners off me, I cogitated a bit. Somehow I was going to get back in, but the question was, how?

It practically answered itself.

Just then I saw a big black limousine rolling toward me, plainly heading for the gate. Quick as a flash I had my hat and coat off and my portable, self-powered cleaner out. As the limo drew up I stepped in front of it. It stopped.

"Emergency quarantine inspection," I said as I hopped around to the driver.

"What is it, driver?" a voice says from the back of the limo.

The driver started to throw words over his shoulder but I was already at the door and yanking it open. In the back of the car there are only two people, a man and a woman. The man is a dark, handsome fellow, about my build, and dressed in a queer getup like an Arab. The woman is young and very pretty.

"I am Prince Gregal of Bella," the dark man says. "Is this delay necessary?"

"Quite, your Highness," I say with my best smile. "And for your own protection. Venusian with a bad case of frammis got loose. Be through in a moment."

And with that I am off, giving the floor a fast going over with the rug

tool. I slip on the upholstery attachment and go to work with that. Then I give his highness and the driver a quick one with the dusting brush.

Starting on the woman, I almost forget what I'm about. What a doll! Hair like a raven's wing, skin like rose petals, black eyes as big as saucers and a smile that turns my spine to jelly. The brush tickles her neck and she tinkles a giggle. Coolie, you old roue, you'd have—

Well, I get it over with, finally. Then, "Would you mind giving me a lift inside?" I ask. "Got some luggage here I had to impound."

"If the Princess Drina does not mind," the Prince says.

FIVE MINUTES later, and with less than that to takeoff time, I am behind a hangar and rifling through all the stuff I have vacuumed out of Prince Gregal's pockets. Sure enough, there is his ticket.

It takes only another minute or so to hail a passing porter and slip him a fiver to lug my stuff aboard the *Spumo*, which is by now busily warming up. Then I wait until almost the last second and make a dash for the ship and race aboard, flashing my ticket and holding a handkerchief to my face like I had a bad case of halitosis.

Coolie, old boy, I don't know another vacuum man in the business who could have managed it.

Anyway, I whisk off to the cabin my ticket entitles me to, give myself a fast and further straightening up, and, with the final revving of motors loud in my ears, step back out into the cabinway.

And guess who I bump into. None other than her ravishing loveliness, Princess Drina! Man! she is even prettier standing up than sitting down. She looks at me and I look at her

and it is love at first sight for at least one of us.

"Your Highness," I bow.

She eyes me askance. "Do I know—?" she starts to say. Then memory serves. "Why....you're the man who—"

"Right."

"Then you're not really a quarantine inspector, if there is such a thing at all?"

"No." I hang my head blushing, but naturally my mind is going like a top. "To tell the truth, Princess, it was just a gag. I've seen pictures of you and I wondered if from up close you were really that beautiful."

Well, Coolie, a woman is a woman, even when she's a princess. She gives me that wonderful laugh, showing she's not at all offended; and I am emboldened to proceed.

"If a commoner may do so without offense, I'd like to invite you to share a cocktail with me," I say.

She taps a white tooth with a long fingernail. "Commoners with shoulders like yours aren't so common. Let's skip the protocol, shall we? Do you dance?"

To make it short, Coolie, we forgot the protocol. Very democratic, these Bellans. We had a drink and a dance or two. Also some very pleasant conversation.

"I hope your brother won't be sore about that quarantine business," I say. After all, I'll be operating in his territory.

"Probably not. He likes a joke." She looks around. "I imagine he'll be along soon. He was detained. Seems he mislaid his ticket and had to see the traffic manager to get it straightened out."

And that reminds her she'd better be dressing for dinner. So I walk her back to her stateroom, which is next to mine, and she agrees to have lunch

with me tomorrow. I could stand a lot more of her company, Coolie.

So now I write this while waiting for the dinner gong. I admit my methods have been crude. But I just did what I had to, keeping in mind our old slogan, "Cleanzo first and the Devil take the hindmost." By the time competition hits Bella I'll have it sewed up tighter than a drum.

There may be a few repercussions. But we've taken off already and at the rate this baby travels it won't pay them to turn around. It'll cost me for a ticket and maybe a bit more, but I'm sure I'll stay aboard.

I'll write again as soon as I hit Bella. And believe me, Coolie, with the field wide open you can expect to hear big things.

As ever,
George

P.S. There's no use your wasting any more expensive gifts on that little blonde at the office. She's all yours. I've switched to brunettes.

G

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella
January 19, 2365

Dear Coolie:

Disaster! As above address testifies, I'm entombed in principal Bellan hoosegow. Charges range from grand theft to plot on Prince Gregal's life. Send cash for bond immediately, also for defense lawyers.

Your pal and star salesman,
George

George Weller
Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella

January 22, 2365

Your latest escapade has almost cost us our export license. As a representative of our company you have involved us in interstellar incident of first magnitude. J.B. himself in here with purple face to raise roof with me. Hope they boil you in oil. And don't call me Coolie!

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
"Gets All The Dirt"

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella
January 30, 2365

Dear Coolie:

I know just how you feel and don't blame you one bit. But believe me, I did it all for Cleanzo. And if it were not for that damned traffic manager at the spaceport, it would have turned out all right.

How was I to know he'd think Prince Gregal was only me in a fancy disguise. And even if he did think so, he didn't have to pop him one on the nose, did he?

First I heard about it was just after I'd finished my letter to you and had dropped it into the mail chute in the stateroom. I was trimming a couple of browning petals from my carnation when there came a fearful banging on the door. I hastened to open up.

The instant I saw the Prince I knew things had gone awry. He was wearing a technicolor shiner and his nose was still a bit bloody. He was considerably mussed up.

Behind him came the captain of the ship, and I couldn't tell which of them

was madder. And behind the captain were a couple of mugs, one of them a mean-looking cuss who reminded me of you.

With my usual aplomb, I invited them in, prepared to discuss the matter and make all possible amends. They jumped the gun on the invitation, however, and before I knew it they were all in the room and the two mugs were muscling me around.

Naturally there is only so much a man with any dignity will take. I let one of the mugs have it, the mean one. After that it turned into quite a brawl.

I didn't get hurt much, you'll be happy to know, but in the fray Prince Gregal acquired another shiner. Someone had also crowned the captain with the water pitcher, and when I say he was as mad as a wet hen I am speaking literally.

He was all for having me thrown through a porthole, but of course that wasn't feasible. After some other suggestions, too horrible to mention, he got quieted down. And after I'd let him know I worked for an outfit that does an awful lot of shipping with his company he toned down still more.

(How he got the impression I was the president of Cleanzo, I don't know. I'm sure I never said so, directly, and you know how people can get things confused when they're excited. As for telling him I just sold vacuum cleaners door to door, I could see no reason to do so.)

Anyway, it was decided I be locked in a hold until the captain could contact his superiors for further orders. It seemed days until they finally came around again, and I could tell at once that the captain was hostile. Really, Coolie, you might have given a better report on me.

However, except for some stiff fines and maybe an assault and battery

charge there was not much could be done to me. That was the word the captain had got, and it seemed to dis-appoint him no end.

It was at this point Prince Gregal stepped in. He's an authority on inter-planetary law, and it was his opinion that I could legally be turned over to Bellan police on arrival and could then be subject to whatever punishment Bellan law found suitable.

The captain warmed up to that idea, and when Prince Gregal mentioned that as Prince he could also sit as judge at my trial, the captain was positively happy.

So that was the upshot. They tossed me back in the hold. And as soon as we docked at Vren spaceport I was hustled into a paddy and rolled off to this caboose.

That should give you a rough idea of the spot I'm in. Coolie, old man, I know you've never liked me despite the fact that as top salesman for the company I've helped make you a success. Or maybe that's why.

But this is no time for petty animosity. Remember, one for all and all for Cleanzo.

As ever,
George

George Weller
Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella

February 5, 2365

You're right: I've never liked you. And you'd have found out soon enough how much. If Prince Gregal can't think of suitable punishment have him radio me collect and I will send along a few suggestions.

Coolington Wells

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Imperial Hotel
Vren, Bella
February 11, 2365

Dear Coolie:

I am out of the clink, as you can see by my new address. It happened this afternoon and to tell the truth I am still a little dazed.

On the way to the courtroom I could already feel the edge of the guillotine on the back of my neck. And when I got a look at Prince Gregal in his judicial robes I could almost feel the blade cut. He still has to wear dark glasses to hide the shiners.

I didn't even have a defense lawyer and had to argue my own case. And believe me, I wasn't doing too well. Finally, in desperation, I tried Rule Seven in the Cleanzo Bible of Selling. To wit: Build up the customer's ego.

So I threw myself on the mercy of the court.

"Your Highness," I said, "I admit I can find no mitigating circumstances. It would take a legal genius to do so. Therefore I am going to turn my defense over to the only one I know by throwing myself upon your mercy. After all, I'm only a vacuum cleaner salesman."

"A what?" he asked.

Imagine, Coolie, he didn't even know what a vacuum cleaner was! He'd never even heard of one. Man, it made my salivary glands go into high!

Well, I gave him a real pitch. I explained all about vacuums and how they got rid of the dirt. And, of course, how Cleanzo is the only one that gets *all* the dirt.

I gave it all I've got. And that, as you know, is plenty. As I spoke I could see the Prince getting interested.

Little by little the frown on his face was replaced by a smile.

"So," he says at last, "it appears that you have come to do the people of Bella a service."

"Precisely, Your Highness. I propose to give you people the best in modern sanitation methods, and that is Cleanzo."

He ponders that a moment. "Tell me, Weller; if I were to set you free, would you promise to confine your efforts to selling these cleaners?"

"Your Highness," I assure him, "morning, noon and night. I'll be so busy pushing Cleanzos I won't have time to get into trouble."

"In that case I hereby release you on probation."

And that was that, Coolie. Furthermore, I have the Prince's promise that I have sole vacuum rights on Bella! How's that for turning defeat into victory?

I'd be out canvassing right now, although it's night, except that I have a date. Princess Drina came down to watch the trial and I ran into her in the hall. It turns out she can't bear a grudge any longer than her brother, so we got things patched up.

First thing in the morning, though, I'll be out knocking on doors. And I'll knock them dead, Coolie. You know me.

In the meantime, I am short of ready cash. A small advance would be appreciated. In fact, it's a necessity. I've written checks I can't cover.

Also, I wish you'd send me a couple of carnations. You know how lost I am without one, and I can't seem to locate a florist here.

George

George Weller
Imperial Hotel
Vren, Bella

February 12, 2365

No advances except against signed orders. So good luck with your sales. Ha ha.

Coolington Wells

P.S. Am sending whole potted carnation plant. You'll need it.

C.W.

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Imperial Hotel
Vren, Bella
February 14, 2365

Dear Coolie:

What a terrific gag, even if the joke's on me! Always said you had a great sense of humor. Send return fare and we'll have a laugh on it together when I see you in N.Y.

George

George Weller
Imperial Hotel
Vren, Bella

February 16, 2365

Dear George:

Drop dead.

Coolington Wells

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella
February 21, 2365

You skunk! You snake! Only a

creature with a mind as vicious, hate-ridden and distorted as yours could conceive of so foul a trick. I always said you were low, but I didn't think even you could sink as low as this.

I should have suspected. I should have known you'd never give me a chance to look good. Ever since we had that sales contest and I sold rings around you, you've been afraid of losing your job to me.

But I never thought you'd do *this* to me!

I went out like a lamb to the slaughter. I went out that first morning with my sample cleaners under my arm and my hopes high. I hit that first door like no door's ever been hit before.

"Good morning," the lady said.

And I was off. She gave me a rough time but I just *had* to get in that house and get the order. She simply couldn't refuse me.

While I unpacked the cleaner I gave her a fast pitch on the impossibility of cleaning house with old-fashioned methods, then a quick run-down on Cleanzo's superiority over all other cleaners.

By then I was set for the demonstration. I whisked that cleaner over the rug in a jiffy. Then I flipped up the lid, yanked out the bag and turned it upside down on the rug. Very gently, very slowly, I lifted the bag.

And there wasn't a speck of dust under it!

Someone else would have given up right then and there. But not me. I tried the upholstery, the bedding, the moldings, everywhere. And no dirt!

I finally gave up and went next door. And the same thing happened!

I must have knocked a hundred doors that day and given forty demonstrations. And when I got through that infernal bag was as clean as the day it was made! I hadn't unloaded a

single cleaner.

Anybody else but George Weller would have quit right there. But not me. Oh, no! Trusting soul that I am, I went right out the next morning and started banging doors again.

And I'd probably still be beating my head against the wall if a woman's husband hadn't come home from work while I was giving her a demonstration. Together they watched me go through those motions that had begun to look insane, even to me.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" he finally asks.

"Cleaning." And I go right on.

"Cleaning what?"

"Dirt."

And then I learned the awful truth: there is *no dirt on Bella!* I learned then the full extent of your fiendishness. I discovered what constitutes Gehenna for a vacuum cleaner salesman.

A world without dirt! A world with a queer, metallic surface on which no vegetation has grown since time immemorial, where even food must be manufactured synthetically. A world without soil.

In all of Bella not a single speck of dust, not a smidgin of soot!

I must have gone a little mad. I kept mouthing words, the old Cleanzo sales talk, but I hardly knew what I was saying. Dirt or no dirt, I was going to sell them a cleaner.

They got scared and sent out a call for help. And when the local constabulary arrived I saw your face on every one of them, the face of drooly Coolie Wells.

I guess I gave them a hard time but they finally subdued me. And so now I am back here.

If not for the outburst, I guess Prince Gregal might have figured I'd been punished enough. But now they've revived all the old charges and added a few new ones, including bad

check passing and resisting arrest.

It doesn't matter. I just want you to know that my last breath will carry a curse on your black soul.

George

George Weller
Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella

February 28, 2365

Dear George:

Sorry I can't do a thing for you. But am sending you another potted carnation as a gift. And to show you how I feel about you I am not charging you with the sample cleaners. You can keep them, a token of my esteem. Ha ha.

Coolington Wells

George Weller
Municipal Jail
Vren, Bella

March 15, 2365

Dear George:

We have received word that purchase has been made by you, on Cleanzo's account, of materials for export to Bella. Cleanzo expects immediate restitution or you will be prosecuted to full extent of the law.

Coolington Wells

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y.

The Royal Palace
Bella
August-3, 2365

Dear Coolie:

Am enclosing check for paltry few

thousand I was forced to charge to Cleanzo's account. So don't bust a gusset, you sissified baboon.

I suppose you thought I'd be dead and buried by now. Too bad I must disappoint you, Coolie old boy. But men of vision and courage will always land on their feet, you know. Although, much as I hate to admit it, your potted carnation was the turning point.

As you know, the Princess Drina never shared her brother's antipathy toward me. Having been exposed to my more charming—or non-professional—side, she found my company pleasant. She was my sole visitor during my last incarceration and did her best to cheer me up, although she admitted my future looked bleak.

It was just before one of her visits that your carnations arrived. When she came into the cell she found me, gallant as ever, placing one in my buttonhole.

After smoothing my hair she asked what the thing was. It seems she and her brother were on Earth hardly overnight and had little chance to observe our flora.

She observed the flower's delightful fragrance and I naturally made her a present of one, tucking it in her hair. It was a lovely moment, Coolie, one which you could hardly be expected to appreciate. She left with the flower still in her hair.

When next I saw her she was still wearing it, although it showed signs of rough usage. It turned out that her brother, who is much interested in natural-curiosa, had got a whiff of the thing at dinner that evening. He had examined it closely, demanded to know what it was, and had decided that nothing would do but he order some from Earth.

It was then the thought struck me, the thought which will make me go

down forever in Bella's history.

"Drina, baby," I said. "I've got to talk to your brother."

"I'm afraid my brother doesn't care for your company," she said. "In fact it was only this morning he told me that if I insisted on bringing up your name he would refuse to speak to me."

"I know, I know. And tell him I don't blame him one bit. But this will interest him tremendously. In fact, it's so terrific I can't even tell *you* about it."

Naturally, her curiosity was aroused, which is just what I'd been counting on. She spent almost an hour trying to make me tell her my idea, but I wasn't giving in.

"He can have a dozen guards in the room if he wants," I said. "Just so they're sworn to secrecy."

WELL, A woman being a woman, Drina just naturally had to find out what the big secret was, even if her brother never spoke to her again. And if the only way she could find out was to get me an audience with him, why she was going to get me that audience.

Sure enough, she did. Her brother was a mighty harassed man if ever I saw one. But as long as he had granted the favor he was going to hear what I had on my mind. He waved the guards from around me and indicated I could speak.

"Your Highness," I said, "I mean in no way to compare myself with you, but I understand we share a common interest."

"Such as—?"

"Flowers. Like the one I'm wearing now. I am told you wish to order some from Earth."

"Quite so," the Prince said. "They should create a stir at our next function."

And right then and there, Coolie, I knew he was in the bag. He had just expressed one of the strongest desires a salesman can latch onto, namely, the desire for social glory. And believe me, I romanced the deal for all it was worth.

"Your Highness," I bowed, "I should like to paint a picture for you. It is your next function. All the guests are assembled. And then you announce that they are about to see something they have never seen before."

"You step to the windows, which have been tightly curtained, and you draw those curtains back so the guests can see outside. And there before their eyes is a garden."

"Yes, your Highness, for the first and only time in Bella's recorded history, a garden! *Your* garden! Not just a bunch of potted plants, or cut flowers waiting to die, but a living, growing garden, a riot of beautiful colors, a bouquet of scents never even dreamed of before."

"What a sensation, your Highness! And yours, all yours!"

It was a real job of selling, Coolie old boy. He tried to put up some resistance, but it was a feeble effort.

"But no vegetation had ever grown on Bella."

"Don't worry, your Highness. I've got it all figured out. Those people will either see a garden in full bloom or they'll see me hanging from the nearest post."

The Prince tapped his fingers thoughtfully. Then: "So be it. And you have proposed your own alternative. They shall see one or the other."

WELL, COOLIE, you never saw a man swing into action like old George. I had only a month to do the job and I meant to get it done. I have never cared for hemp neckties.

I got a crew together and set them to breaking the surface of the yard behind the palace ballroom. Then I got off an order to Earth for tons and tons of good black dirt. And an order for hundreds of shrubs and seedlings. (That's when I used the Cleanzo account.)

Luckily, the climate on Bella is good. The broken surface provided decent drainage and there was plenty of water. That was all I needed.

When Prince Gregal pulled those curtains you could have heard a rosebud open. Every bigwig in Bellan nobility was there, but they looked like a bunch of gawking yokels. I really wowed them.

And were they green with envy! Some of them tried to cover up but it was no soap. They weren't fooling anyone, least of all Prince Gregal.

I will say the Prince is a square shooter. He gave all the credit to me. And right on the spot he acquitted me of all charges.

He went even further than that. When I came to him a little later that evening and told him how everyone was pestering me to make gardens for them, he said he believed I should. And to top it all, he offered to help finance me.

So the last few months have been busy ones, Coolie. I've already made a fortune and I'm hardly finished with the nobility. This week I'm hiring another thousand men and next week I start work on the backlog from wealthy merchants and industrialists.

But the big stuff is yet to come. Mass production, Coolie! New low prices! Nothing down and an easy payment plan! And a new slogan that's sweeping Bella: A Garden For

Every Bellan!

In five years I'll have this entire planet covered with a layer of earth a yard thick. I'll be the richest man in the universe.

And I know, Coolie, that nobody will be happier for me than you. Ha ha.

George

George Weller
The Royal Palace
Bella

August 13, 2365

Dear George:

You're a genius! I always said so and I'm saying it again. What a brain, what a salesman! But here's something I'll bet you haven't thought of. With all that dirt around, what a chance to "Clean Up With Cleanzo!" So get on the ball and start selling.

Your old pal,
Coolie

Coolington Wells
Cleanzo Cleaners
11111 Fifth Ave.
New York, N. Y.

August 20, 2365

You're right, I hadn't thought of it. Thanks for the idea. Am breaking ground this week for my own vacuum cleaner factory. And I wish you wouldn't call me George. Since I've married into the royal Bellan family. I think it only proper you address me as

His Highness
Prince George

THE END

Make Mine a Mermaid

By Gilbert Grant

**What started out as an effort to get
back a fishbowl, changed into a mad dash
to rescue the girl with a beautiful tail**





"Let him go with us, Father Neptune," she pleaded. "You see, I love him!"

WHIT HAYNES swore savagely as the phone jangled its summons again. He had just replaced it on the hook a second before. His feelings were still in his voice when he answered, but at sound of the feminine voice from the other

end he calmed down.

It was Janice Greyson.

"Hello, dear! ... Fine, and you? ... " He wished that she had more life in her voice. She always sounded as if she had just awakened. "... Lunch? I think so. Okay. At the Bravo, twelve

thirty. 'By."

Then he remembered the other call and anger twisted his usually pleasant features into a grim mask. He shoved himself away from the desk and stood up, a tall young man, lean and muscular, with pleasant features and crisp, curling dark hair. A sigh pulled itself up from the depths of his soul as he turned and marched to the office, on the closed front door on which stood out in small letters the simple legend, *S.B. Peyton, Collection Manager*.

S. B. PEYTON had contributed thirty years of his life to the Greyson Department store, twenty of them in the capacity of collection manager. He was a small man, paunchy, with a large smiling face. When you took the face apart, feature by feature, nothing smiled in it. He had round cold eyes, hidden beneath fatty lids, a thin small mouth whose corners were turned perpetually upward, a heart as big as a dime and a manner that was as honest as a three-dollar bill.

At the moment he was in his favorite pose, arms folded over the glass desk-top, eyes fixed at a point approximately two feet above the tip of Whit Haynes' right ear.

"What happened with the Davis account, Haynes?" Peyton asked softly.

"Nothing. I got the—"

"Nothing?" Peyton's voice rose slightly in surprise. "The man becomes a skip and it's nothing to you?"

"How the devil did I know Davis was going to skip?" Haynes asked. He tried to keep his voice under control. "I got the card and went out there; a three story walk-up on Kenmore. Two-room kitchenette. Davis is there and he's got the furniture with him. The television set, couch and aquarium. They were the only pieces of furniture in the place, far as I

could see. I gave it to him straight. Pay up or we pull. He begged for just a couple of days more time..."

Peyton's eyes were as cold as a couple of marbles fresh out of a freezer. "And you gave it to him. Very nice. I'm surprised you didn't tell him to forget entirely about paying."

Whit found he was clenching his hands. He smiled with an effort. But he knew if he didn't smile he would say things he might regret. Peyton's lips curled in an answering smile.

"Yes," Peyton went on, "it was decent of you to allow this man more time. After all, he hasn't paid a penny on the account since it was opened, hasn't answered a single letter, hasn't had a phone in two months and is in arrears for the second month in his rent. This makes him an excellent risk. It was fortunate that I saw the card this morning. I'm quite certain that had the pull-truck arrived later there wouldn't have been anything to pull. As it is we have salvaged the set and couch.

"Now it's going to be up to you to get the aquarium back. He managed to sneak that out!"

Whit could contain himself no longer. He leaned forward until his face was inches from the other's. "Why? Or rather, why me? There's a skip tracer whose job that is. Maybe I made a mistake. Hell! The guy looked like he was sick, like he hadn't had a meal in days. I don't like running guys down. I'm no bloodhound!"

Peyton leaned back. His hands smacked hard against the arms of the chair. His voice was as cold as his eyes. "Haynes. I didn't ask for you. Mr. Greyson told me you're working here and will be for the next year. That was six months ago. It seems I can't fire you. But let's get something straight between us right now. I don't care if you're going to inherit the

store, whether you're R. G. Haynes' grandson, or if you're just a stock clerk who got promoted. This department is mine and I run it the way I see fit.

"When I tell you to do something you do it...or quit! I said this Davis was a deadbeat. He's proved himself one. He quit his job as a chemist the day after he got the furniture. Maybe he's got an idea, or had, that we'd forget about him. But I won't. And some day he'll get a job. He'll get a garnishment slapped on him so fast he won't have time to blink!

"But about you. I want you to trace him. Starting right now. Get down to that Kenmore address and start on the ball. I'm not saying another word, just leaving it to you."

Whit knew he was licked. He could quit, as Peyton had said. But Whit knew he couldn't. He turned and shuffled out the door and back to his cubicle.

Three times he reached for the phone and three times he pulled his hand back. Janice Greyson did not like being stood up. The fourth time he got the phone off the cradle. He was right. Her voice was cold and distant when he told her he would have to break their luncheon date.

"...But darling," she said in that 'let's-not-be-silly' voice. "You *must* come. Really. You're just not assertive enough. After all, one day you will be a partner in Greyson's..."

He couldn't tell her it was impossible to go over Peyton's head. It just wasn't the thing to do. It would have branded him as a weakling. Icicles dripped from her words when he told her it was impossible to make it.

"...Very well," she said crisply. "I won't trouble coming down then. It's obvious your work is of *such* importance that I mean much less to you. 'By.'"

He jiggled the phone but she had hung up on him. He shrugged and hoped that her present mood would be dissipated by evening. They had a date to go to the Cozy Club, the newest night-club sensation, where be-bop was king.

HER NAME was Mrs. Lorenz and she had seen the man across the way taking the aquarium down the back stairs. "...I felt real sorry for him. He looked so worn out. Thought he'd fall at the turn in the landing. Yep..." Her false upper plate flopped badly and she smiled with closed lips. They moved for an instant as she settled the plate in position. "Beats me how he did it."

"Well," Whit said easily. "Couldn't have gone too far. Unless it was empty, of course."

"Nope! Full. Water splashed down the stairs. And he might be further than you think."

Whit's eyebrows lifted.

"Serves that nosy old Mrs. Hild right. Always sticking her face into people's business. Took her kid Billy's wagon. Hah!" Mrs. Lorenz shrilled a sound of laughter. The plate almost fell out altogether and Whit had to wait until she got it back into place with a practised movement of her lips. "I peeked out the window. He went north."

"Thank you, Mrs. Lorenz!" Whit accented the name, tipped his hat and scurried down the back stairs.

It was a cold trail. But a man lugging an aquarium on a child's wagon was bound to attract some attention. Davis had gone north, the woman said. But maybe he went north because he knew she was watching. Well, Whit had all afternoon to chase the skip. Whit went east toward the lake a couple of blocks away.

There was always a traffic policeman at the Edgewater Hotel. If Davis was still going north the man had probably seen him. He had.

"Stopped for the lights. Funny-looking guy. Goofy, if you ask me. Y'know, eyes like a couple of burnin' coals. Asks me a screwy question. Wants to know where there's a beach, says he's gotta give the little fish a swim. I tried to see what the fish was but there was so much weeds and stuff at the bottom of the tank I couldn't."

Whit thanked the cop and crossed over to the east side of Sheridan Road and continued north. He puffed lazily at a cigarette as he walked and thought about Davis and the aquarium. "Must be nuts, all right. What the hell would he need with that tank? Now if he'd taken the couch it would make sense. He could maybe get twenty-five bucks or so for it. And the television set would bring more... But a tank, even with a fish in it..."

A couple of youngsters crossed his line of vision. They were in bathing suits. He followed them to a street-end beach a short distance in from the drive. There were two or three heads bobbing in the water and here and there on the strip of dirty sand people lounged and sun-bathed. But of Davis and the wagon and aquarium—nothing.

WHIT found a newspaper and sat on it and looked out at the water sparkling its wave tips. The sky was cloudless and the day was pleasant. His mind turned on the problem of the missing Davis and the aquarium but after a while Whit was just content to relax in the warmth of the sun.

The thing whacked him on the temple, bounced off and rolled a half dozen feet. Whit looked dazedly at it and recognized it as a hard-rubber ball.

"...Gee! I'm sorry, mister. The ball slipped."

Whit looked up. A bright-eyed boy stood before him. He was bronzed to a mahogany color and wore a pair of swim trunks a full size too large. A pair of grimy hands stole down and hitched the trunks up a couple of inches.

A shadow marched up and joined the shadow of the other.

"He didn't mean it, mister!" The shadow belonged to another boy, of about the same age and general appearance. This one's eyes met Whit's squarely.

Whit's anger, quick to form, dissipated as quickly. His smile found answers in their grins. "Oh. That's all right," he said. "Say! You kids sure are brown. I'll bet you spend all day out here."

"Sure do, mister," the second said. It was obvious that he was the leader. "We live over there..." His head gestured to a large court building bordering the beach.

A sudden thought occurred to Whit at the words. He made a fast calculation. The pull-truck had come at about nine-thirty, Peyton knew of Davis' runout ten minutes later, and Whit knew of it shortly after. He looked at his watch. Ten minutes of twelve... Davis had been on the loose about two and a half hours. Maybe, Whit thought. A chance, but maybe...

"Look, kids." He spoke soberly and they instantly fell in with his mood. Their faces went serious and they moved in toward him a couple of steps. "Maybe you can help me."

The one who took the lead nodded his head sharply. "If it ain't too hard."

"We'll see. It's a memory test. You say you've been out here all morning. Since about nine, huh...?"

They nodded.

"Good! Now look! Somebody stole

a scooter wagon belonging to my kid. A neighbor saw this man take it. She said he put an aquar—; he put one of those square things they keep goldfish in, on the wagon and ran away with it."

He didn't have to go further. He had hit paydirt with his first try. It was in their faces and the way they were trembling to tell.

"You *did* see him!"

"Yeah," the word came from both. The leader shoved at the other. "Le'me tell. He came here about—gee, I don't know what time it was. But me and Jimmy followed him until he chased us. He went up that way..." His hand pointed dramatically due north. "Yeah. He was kinda goofy, mister. We saw him all right. Can we go with you an' help catch him, huh?"

Whit came to his feet and reached in his pocket. Their eyes went wide at sight of the dollar bill he extended. "Get yourselves some ice cream with this," Whit said. "And split it fifty-fifty. Understand?"

Then he was on his way, due north, just as the youngster had pointed.

The beaches did not lie in a straight stretch of sand but weaved back and forth so that Whit had to go slowly. He covered three of them in something more than an hour. Walking the sand in street shoes, and wearing a suit was not the coolest thing. He came to the end of the third beach and leaned tiredly against the wires of a fence which once had extended across the crab grass, separating it from the next beach. The fence had been torn and bent long ago and only a few feet of it remained upright close to the water.

His eyes followed the barrier to the point where it stopped. The water was lapping lazily at it. A handle of some sort was sticking straight up a

couple of inches from the fence, like a closed-pronged periscope...

Whit sighed and stepped away from the fence and began his first step over the broken part. He did not take the second. That pronged periscope. A handle. The handle to a scooter wagon, maybe... It was. And in it, covered with water, the missing aquarium!

HE STOOD in the water up to his knees and gloated over it. Peyton wouldn't have much to say about his finding it, but Whit knew how disappointed the collection manager would be. For Peyton and Whit both knew how tough a chase Whit had been assigned to. Whit shook his head once more, and started to move back to where his socks and shoes were lying on the sand. Something moved swiftly in the aquarium.

Once more Whit bent to look. Water swirled muddily. A fish swam excitedly into view and disappeared an instant later. Once more it came into view. There was something below that was exciting the fish. Whit bent closer and narrowed his eyes. There was another fish there; he could see its fins and, for a swift instant, its arms.

The word Whit thought of came back to him. *Arms!*

It was a summer's day, cloudless and hot. But Whit Haynes felt a sudden shiver of cold steal down his spine. *Arms!* He was imagining things. Impossible things!

Once more the fish swam into view, and this time came up to the surface of the water. Only the tail moved gently as it seemed to come to immobility. The wide eyes were looking straight into Whit's. There was something in those fish eyes, something that was a message...

As of their own volition Whit's arms plunged down into the water, almost

to his shoulders. His fingers groped for and found the other fish and in finding, felt what had happened. The tail had been caught against a stone wedged against the side of the tank. The fingers shoved the stone off and grasped the fish daintily and pulled it up out of the water.

Whit stared at it, mesmerised. It was a fish... it wasn't a fish... it was a fish. But it wasn't, Whit knew. And knew why Davis wanted the tank. It was a—a—he gave it the word, mermaid!

The tiny lips were parted and moving. He brought the small thing close to one ear. "Hey, dad! Let's get out of here. Quick. Before the stuff starts working."

He was sure he'd heard right. The head was jerking up and down in agitation. He *had* heard right.

His voice was normal in tone: "Where...?" He stopped as she clapped her hands to the side of her head.

Her lips framed the words, "Not so loud."

He nodded understandingly and whispered, "Where can I take you?"

Once more he held her close to an ear, "Put me in one of your pockets. I won't smother. Just get me out of here, dad. Get on the ball."

The piping on the pocket was an inch above her head.

THE TWO youngsters he had left three beaches behind were staring up at him with wide, solemn eyes. His feet and eyes matched in wariness as he advanced.

"...Whaja find, a crab, mister?"

"...A fish?"

"...We followed you."

"Whaja find, a crab, mister?"

Whit moved past them, pulled his socks and shoes on over his wet feet and stood up. His face twisted in a

scowl. "Beat it, kids!" he snarled.

They beat it.

He smiled and spoke aloud: "Sure are tough. With ten-year-olds."

He could have sworn there was an answering voice: "Stop talking to yourself and get me some privacy."

He had parked his car on the drive a few blocks south of the Edgewater Hotel. He decided against walking to it. The urgency in the mermaid's voice made him flag down a cab. He remembered thinking how even if the day ended in failure, he would at least be close to home.

Home was a large residential hotel in the sixties on Sheridan. He was unaware of the curious looks thrown in his direction. Not even the elevator operator's, "Swimming, Mr. Haynes?" made an impression. He had forgotten his trousers were still damp all the way to his knees and that he had shoved his arms into the water without removing his jacket.

There were but two doors on his floor. He opened the one to the left, and made for the bathroom at a run. He lifted the tiny figure out of his pocket and held her over the tub and whispered, "This be all right?"

Her head moved up and down.

He turned on the cold water tap and waited for several seconds until there was a couple of inches of water showing in the tub. Then: "Will you be all right in there? Or should I wait until the tub is full?"

Her lips were moving again. He held her close to his ear once more: "I'll be all right. Just hurry..."

His hand trembled as he placed her gently into the water. His head went up at the sound of a discreet tapping at the outside door. He waved to the tiny creature swimming about and left the room, closing the door behind him.

A bellhop was standing before the door, a message in one hand. Whit

gave the boy a quarter and opened the folded bit of paper. It said simply that "Miss Greyson called and said she would meet you at the Cozy Club."

Whit closed the door again and walked back into the spacious apartment. He tossed the crumpled message into a wastepaper basket and removed his jacket and shirt and went into the master bedroom and slipped a fresh shirt on. And all the time his thoughts revolved around the missing Davis. What had happened to the man? Why had he left the tank in the water? Was it his intention to return?

Whit looked up to find himself looking at a strange face. It was a face on which bewilderment fought a losing battle with wonder. It was his face. Remembrance made his grey eyes go wide and usually strong jaw go slack. The miniature mermaid! He had forgotten her!

He skidded past the bathroom on the throw rug and slammed against the corner of the hall leading to the kitchen. His hand came up too late to protect himself and his nose received the brunt of the blow. Skyrockets with streaming tails exploded before his eyes. Then his vision cleared and he shook his head. Bloody droplets made a scatter print on the wall. Jamming a kerchief against his bleeding nose he opened the door to the bathroom.

THEY WERE white, round, firm, and their beauty and closeness startled him. Then his eyes went up and down and his face turned a color matching that of his nose. Lying full-length in the tub was the most gorgeous creature Whit Haynes had ever seen, or ever hoped to. Hair the color of brass fresh from the furnace; eyes a dancing blue; saucy nose; curving beckoning lips.

"Hel-lo..." Her voice was low, ten-

der, inviting.

He grinned vacuously.

"Like me, dad?"

The grin became wider, more vacuous.

"Well, stop licking your chops, Jack, and get me some clothes. Little Mabel isn't going to spend the rest of her life in this tub."

He backed out, still grinning. "Dad... Jack... Mabel... Clothes..." Reason chased emptiness from his eyes. What had happened? He had put a tiny creature, half-fish, half-woman, a creature perhaps six or seven inches long, into the tub. He had come back to find this beauteous creature floating lazily in it. No! The other had a tail. This one... Sweat broke out on his forehead at the thought of the slim curving limbs he had glimpsed in the water. No tail there...

Clothes! My God! A naked woman in my tub. And Janice is going to pick me up tonight!" The thoughts popped into his mind like corn blossoming in a popper. Then he remembered and sighed in relief. He had to meet her at the Cozy Club. But the mermaid had mentioned clothes. Obviously he couldn't keep her there in the bathroom without them. His jaw went slack again. *He couldn't keep her at all!*

He took the kerchief from his nose and looked at it. A shudder shook him as he tossed it into the waste basket. His nose felt three times its normal size and was stuffed with coagulated blood. But it had stopped bleeding. He took out his lighter and pressed the lever. Flame glowed brightly. He held it up before his nose and waited. Nothing happened. He had forgotten to take out a cigarette.

He put the lighter away. His mind settled into brooding thought: "Hey! Let's get sharp, boy! You know it's

true but it's a cinch you'll never get anyone to believe you. Besides, there are bits missing to this puzzle. So get her some clothes first and ask questions later. And don't forget to call Peyton..."

THE WOMAN in the apparel shop waited for an answer to her question on sizes. Her eyes went wide and said, "Really!" at Whit's involuntary cupping gesture. He flushed to the roots of his curling hair.

"Uh. I don't really know her size, miss. She's —uh — well — she's about..."

The woman said, "Ye-ess?"

That didn't help either. Whit went back to making gestures. The woman smiled and waited until he was through. "I think I have an idea now."

"I'll bet you have," Whit thought. "And it's not about sizes, either."

But no matter what the woman's thoughts might have been, the clothes fit to perfection. Whit had opened the door a crack and had shoved the whole lot of them into the bathroom. A muffled voice thanked him. Minutes went by. Then the door opened.

Whit blew his breath out in a soundless whistle of appreciation. Mermaid or no, Mabel was a sight for tired eyes and lazy hormones. It was hard, but Whit forgot her physical dimensions as he took her hand and led her to the overstuffed couch fronting the imitation fireplace. He smiled in reassurance as her eyes questioned him.

"Got to get ourselves straight, you know," he said lightly. "Which means no more double-talk. I'm hep, but let's stick to basic English. Okay?"

"I'm with it, Jack," she said.

"The name is not Jack. It's Haynes, Whit Haynes."

She made a little girl's face and leaned her wealth of hair against the

back of the sofa. The clean smell of it floated to Whit and he almost forgot what he was about to say. His lips thinned in resolution and his eyes steeled themselves.

"Fine. Now that's settled. I think I'm a fairly intelligent and observing person. Therefore I can't deny what my eyes saw. And what they see now. I've tried to rationalize it but can't. Explain, please."

"From the beginning?"

He nodded his head.

"Okay. You asked for it. When twilight came to the days of the Gods, Father Neptune decided that it would be better for his children to disappear. Mortals would never understand such things as mermaids.

"He reminded us that we were immortal. And that since things were as they were he was going to do something about our size. Shrink us. It took quite a while but in the end we were all the size you found me. Then we all went back into the sea and there he gave us a last lecture and we went our separate ways. Now, is that hard to believe?"

"Even for Ripley," Whit said. "Go on. What about this Davis character? How did you and he get together?"

A tremor shook her. The laughter went out of her eyes. "Davis? Character is the right word. I'm sure you won't believe this. It's going to sound fantastic..."

"The rest of it wasn't," Whit thought, "but this is going to be."

"....I met Davis in a package of frozen fish. Fresh-frozen fish...."

"Davis was in the package...?" Whit could not contain the incredulity in his voice.

"No, silly! I was. Davis bought the package in the store. The whole thing was stupid! Of me, I mean. I was racing a gang of sardines in the fjord, when *wham!* the race was over. And

the next thing I know we're in a smelly hold, me and ten thousand sardines. Almost smothered to death.

"They dumped us out and women sorted us and fresh-froze us in packages. Three days later I was on Davis' table. Sheer luck made him single me out for boiling, otherwise I would have ended up as part of a sandwich. Davis loved fish. As food. To make it short, he thawed me out and put me in a pot. I don't know how long I was in that pot but one night he hauled me out, stuck a tiny needle in me and when I came to, I was like you see me now. Without clothes, of course. At the beginning he was interested in me only as something to experiment on. Later, he got interested in me, period. Then, last night, he gave me the needle, shrunk me and today he took me for a ride and dumped me in the lake. And that's the story of me and Mr. Davis."

WHIT'S brain was whirling like a yo-yo. He believed every word she said. Nobody else would, however. "I suppose I'll have to buy that. Couple of things confuse me. Why did Davis buy a couch and television set?"

"I asked him to. I love television. Somebody on a beach had a portable battery set one night. Saw it for the first time and fell in love with it. The couch was simple. I'd sit on it to watch.

"Well. Now that I've talked, how about you? Why are you interested in this Davis character?"

"In a minute. You said something about Davis injecting you with something and you became the size you are now. Tell me more."

"I can tell you this. It's no fun having a needle shoved into a very sensitive part of one's anatomy. I don't know what it was. Davis is nuts! Most of the time he'd talk to himself. Seems he is, or was, a chemist. He

quit his job shortly after he found me. Anyway, he made up this solution and injected me with it. At first I was kept busy changing size every couple of minutes. Then he perfected it to where I can go a week without needing a needle. I drink the stuff to make me small; the needle makes me big. He gave me the needle this morning."

Time passed while Whit digested what she told him. She grew restive after a while and busied herself smoothing out the wrinkles in his sleeve. Then her hands went to his tie and knots formed beneath her fingers. She drew herself closer so that when he finally turned to her he found her face inches from his, her lips almost on his, her sweet breath clouding his own and the warmth of her body irresistible.

He wondered about her lips. They couldn't possibly be as sweet as they looked. They were. More time passed. She took his hands away and leaned away from him.

"You're sweet," she said softly. "You're a real dad. I like you. Tell me about you."

A be-bop kid, hep talk, a mermaid; Mabel, the mermaid from a package of Mermaid's Fresh-frozen Mermaids ... The smile on Whit's lips was fatuous. Her elbow tickled his ribs.

"... Well, don't sit there like a silly goon. How did you get into this script?"

He started to give her a thumbnail sketch and finished by using his whole hand. About the will his grandfather, R. G. Haynes had made, leaving the grandfather's half-interest in Greyson's to Whit on the condition he work in the collection department for a full year; about S. B. Peyton; about his childhood and all the way to the present, and finally, about Janice Greyson.

"So she's beautiful?" Mabel asked softly.

Whit nodded. Then he howled in

pain and drew his leg to one side and rubbed his thigh furiously. "What the heck was the idea of digging your nails into me?"

"How can she be beautiful, this iceberg, this woman who has nothing but money in her heart and mind?" the girl at his side asked scornfully. "Your taste is in your eyes."

He felt surprise at her scorn, then anger, then his mind took over where his feelings left off and he realized he had spoken aloud of how he felt deep within himself about Janice. Perhaps this girl was right? It was the first time he had taken Janice out of his emotions and set her away from him and looked at her and saw what she really was—selfish, domineering and...

On the other hand it was none of this girl's, this mermaid's business!

"How do you know what she's like?" he demanded.

"I'll prove she's what I said. This chick's a hep gal. Real, but real cr-r-azy! I'm going to the Cozy Club with you."

"The he— You are not!"

Her eyes were half-closed and a shadow of a smile hung about her lips....

THE FRONT man smiled a welcome at Whit. As Mabel walked by the man's eyes rolled in his head to follow her. "The Cozy Club is glory-bound, tonight!" the front man said.

Whit tossed his hat to the check girl and followed the head waiter to the table Whit and Janice usually occupied. Whit had reserved it. The waitress came over and took their orders. Whit took scotch and water and Mabel ordered a double bourbon.

He kept his eyes from the girl opposite him. It was hard to think about anything when you had to look at her all the time. And Whit had to think.

The situation, as it had evolved, was impossible and intolerable. He had started out from the office this morning bent on tracing a skip, and now he was sitting in a be-bop temple with a mermaid! Something had to be done about it!

But what—?

There was the shuffling sound of the waitress bringing their drinks and her voice, "Mix it, sir?"

He said, "Yes," and looked over to Mabel, who was smiling contentedly at him. Her drink was before her. His eyebrows went up at the amount of whiskey in her glass.

"Davis was always drinking this," she explained. "I tried it once but it seemed bitter. I think maybe I'll try it again."

A satisfying feeling of relief gripped him. The whole problem was going to be solved. All one had to do was order double bourbons. Whit lifted his glass toward her and their glasses touched in a silent toast. Hers was as empty as his when they placed them on the table.

MABEL was on her fourth double bourbon when Janice walked in. She moved directly to their table and sat down. Whit was cold sober. Mabel gave the other girl a vacant smile and aimed her drink at her lips. It spilled a bit over the side of her mouth.

"Disgusting!" Janice said coldly.

"Wha'ss dishgusting?" Mabel asked. Her face had developed a decided leer.

"Everything about this."

"Thish mus' be Mish Greyshon," Mabel announced loudly.

"...The cold, beautiful, Mish Greyshon," Mabel howled.

Whit's first feeling had been one of dismay. But in Janice's voice he had detected a faint note of jealousy. He sat back and gave his blindest look to both of them.

"I beg your pardon," Janice said.

Her voice should have frozen the other girl. It merely warmed her up.

"Whit...Whit told me all about you," Mabel howled above the wild sounds of music. She waved a limp finger in front of her eyes. The finger fascinated her and for a second or two became involved in watching it before realizing it belonged to her. She looked down at her glass and saw it was empty. "Whit. Pleash order me another durble burble, I mean—" she gave him a foolish grin—"I mean another burble durble." She sighed unhappily. "I really mean another dourbon dourbon."

Whit signaled the waitress.

Janice was making a studious effort to avoid the other. She turned to Whit, pointedly ignoring Mabel, and said: "I thought surely you would have enough consideration for me, enough respect, not to place me in such an embarrassing position."

"Respect and consideration are unusual words coming from you," Whit said easily. "I never thought you knew them."

Janice bit her lip. Whit was being difficult. The whole situation was difficult. And surprising. She had never thought Whit could do anything like this. And with such an evident floozy. Obviously blondined hair. And those clothes. She must have gotten them in a bargain basement.

The band launched into a danceable number.

Janice rose, looked at Whit with a question in her eyes. He stood up, and said to Mabel as he moved toward Janice: "Not too fast with that drink, honey. I'll be back."

Janice was a superlative dancer. And for thirty-two bars Whit forgot the other girl. But Janice couldn't keep her mouth shut.

"Who is that girl? Where did you meet her? And why in the name of Heaven did you bring her here when

you knew we had this date?"

"Her name is Mabel, and she's a real mermaid," Whit said. "I met her on the beach."

UNDERSTANDING flooded Janice

Greyson's eyes. Whit was *drunk*! How *stupid* of her not to have seen it! "Oh! You poor boy. I understand, darling. That old meanie Peyton got you so upset because you couldn't have lunch with your honey-woney that you went out and got drunk."

Janice should have kept her mouth closed. There were many things Whit did not like about Janice, but the least forgiveable was her habit of calling him honey-woney.

"No," he mimicked her voice. "That old meanie Peyton did *not* get your honey-woney upset. Janey-waney got your honey-woney upset and he went out and got drunk. For your information S. B. Peyton is the best thing in the store."

"Your making a scene, Whit!" Janice broke in sharply. She hated scenes. "People are staring at us."

"So let 'em have a good look," Whit said.

"May I have this nex' dansh?" a honeyed voice broke in. Mabel, seeing them come to a stop, had lurched onto the floor.

"Go away!" Janice said.

Mabel's mouth set in stubborn lines. "I wanna dansh whit Whit! *You* go away. Here. Take thish whit you."

"Thish" proved to be a fish. Janice's hand reached for it involuntarily. She screamed and dropped it to the floor. A number of couples had stopped dancing at the sound of the quarrel. Everybody stopped dancing at Janice's scream. Even the band stopped playing.

"Where'd you get the fish?" Whit asked in stanned surprise.

Mabel made a rapid motion with her hands and another fish lay in one

palm. She tossed it to Whit who dropped it as swiftly as he caught it. She gave him a hurt look.

"How dare you?" Janice's voice was shrill.

"An itty fish like that and you're scared? Well, here!" Mabel said and stepped in front of Janice, hiding her from Whit for an instant. When she stepped back Janice was clawing at the low neckline of her cocktail frock and was moving in a wild cooch dance at the same time.

Wild applause broke from the on-lookers, the band played a strip number and Janice hopped about, both hands now deep within the dress.

When they came out they were holding onto a four-pound salmon. It fell to the floor with a dull plop and skidded toward a corner. Janice then fainted.

Whit took one look at the girl on the floor, another at Mabel, smiling happily at everyone, and made up his mind. He grabbed Mabel by the hand, and ran toward the door. The car was a half block down. He ran blindly toward it, Mabel, like the tail of a comet, stumbling along behind. He skidded to a halt before the car, opened the door and shoved Mabel in.

A VOICE said: "I was beginning to wonder how long you were going to be."

The voice came from behind him. He turned and saw Davis standing there. Something hard nudged Whit.

"It's a gun. Crawl over the girl. I'll sit at this end," Davis said.

Ice cold rage made a tight knot in Whit Haynes' belly. He started the car and drove slowly away from the curb. "Any place in particular you want me to drive you?"

"Us," the other corrected him. "Yes. To the beach where I left the aquarium."

It was a good three miles to the beach from the Cozy Club. Whit drove slowly. He had to have time to think and plan. He was sure Davis was crazy. "Y'know," he said carefully. "The wrong guy's a skip tracer for Greyson's. You should have the job. How'd you do it?"

"It was rather simple." Davis' voice was pleased with his own cunning. "I came back for the aquarium and Mabel and found her missing. It was I who had placed the stone in such a manner she couldn't escape. Of course she couldn't drown. Therefore someone removed her since she couldn't move the stone.

"There were a couple of kids playing on the sand. Even children know the value of money. It was a man who had taken something from the aquarium. They told me. A man who had asked if they had seen anyone wheeling a small wagon with an aquarium on it. Easy!" He snarled suddenly, as Whit started to make a wrong turn against a light. There was a cop on the opposite corner. "The girl and you both will get it!"

Whit swallowed hard and made the proper turn.

"That's better. As I was saying, it was someone who knew about the wagon and the aquarium and was looking for me. It had to be someone from Greyson's. So I called and asked and they gave me S. B. Peyton, your boss. I told him who I was and that I had the aquarium but that I also had money and who should I pay? He told me you, and furnished me with your address."

WHIT PROMISED himself one thing: the day he acquired his half share in Greyson's he was going to give the old S. B. the tongue lashing of his life. Then fire him! That is, if Whit were alive to be there.

"... Funny thing. Bellboys know the value of money too. This one I talked to did. He told me you got a message from a Miss Greyson which asked you to meet her at the Cozy Club. I called Miss Greyson and I told her I was the manager of the club and was calling to verify the reservation. She told me the time it was for. Simple, no?"

"No! Very smart," Whit said icily. "And stop playing games. What do you want of us?"

"Us?" Davis asked in surprise. "You sound worried about her. After all, she is a mermaid, remember? Not a mortal at all. A demi-god, one of Neptune's children."

"I don't care if she's one of the children of the old lady who lived in a shoe. What do you want of us?"

"Of you—nothing. Unfortunately, you're in the way. I will remove you, for a while. But of Mabel I want a great deal."

Blood spurted warmly suddenly into Whit's mouth. He had bitten through his lower lip. It tasted of salt and iron. Davis' voice was theatrical, dramatically pitched, but terribly effective. He looked sidewise at the girl. She was sitting with her head thrown back against the seat. Her eyes were closed and the long lashes made faint shadows under her eyes. She was breathing regularly and her perfectly shaped mouth had never looked more desirable.

No. He couldn't risk a sudden break. Davis was holding the gun against the girl's side....

"WELL!" Whit slid the car in against the concrete barrier fronting the beach. "Here we are."

Davis shoved the gun against the girl's side, awakening her. She looked down at the gun without comprehension. It meant nothing to her. Davis nudged her and said:

"All right, Mabel. You and the boy friend, out."

Whit slid from behind the wheel and the girl followed. Davis came last, the pistol at his side, its black mouth held toward the others in unwavering menace.

"Start walking to the fence. I'll tell you when to stop."

They were at the water's edge—before he halted them. They had passed several couples lying on the sand but there was no one with sight or hearing at the point where they finally stopped.

Whit looked about. There was nothing to see. A last-quarter moon hung low to the southwest but its light was feeble. Another few minutes and darkness would be complete. Even the beach lights were out.

"We're quite alone," Davis said. "No one to disturb us. Now then. I have something for you, my dear. See. The needle..."

She shrank against Whit at sight of it. "No! No more." The effects of the liquor had worn off.

"Oh, yes, Mabel. Once more! The last time.—There will be no more shrinking after this one. You will remain as you are."

"But I don't want to remain as I am."

"No matter. I want you... as you are. Come here!"

As though she were hypnotised, Mabel took the first step. Davis' mouth was twisted in a crooked grin. She took another slow step, a third.

"That's fine," Davis said. "And now for Mr. Busy here." The gun suddenly came up, and pointed straight at Whit's chest. Little lumps of muscle stood out along the mad chemist's jaw. The finger on the trigger began to squeeze slowly on the curved bit of metal.

Davis made only one mistake. He had to look at Whit to shoot him, which meant his eyes were off of the

girl for that instant. Long enough for her to act.

Both her hands went down on the gun arm, fingers clawing at the wrist.

The gun went off but the shot was wild. Then Whit was on the other. Davis was shorter, lighter, not as strong. But his strength was the wild strength of insanity. The girl was flung to one side as Whit came in close. It was a fight in which rules were discarded. Davis kicked, bit, kneed and tried to gouge, and after a while Whit played the same game.

Whit's greater strength won out at the end. The gun was wrenched from Davis' fingers and fell to the sand. A low grunt of satisfaction was wrenched from Whit's lips. Then he was stooping for the gun.

THE NEEDLE went in for its entire length. Whit, concentrating on the gun had forgotten the needle. Davis, in a last lunge to retrieve the gun, had slammed the needle home into Whit's back.

It did not stop Whit from getting the gun. He whirled with it in his hand. "Get back!" he growled in warning. "I'd kill you as quick as I'd kill any other kind of snake."

Davis was doubled up as if in pain. Choking sounds came from the man's throat, explosive sounds of laughter.

"Hee-hee! The wrong one got the needle. Who knows what it will do to you..."

They had not long to wait. Whit felt suddenly as if he were being torn apart. Every nerve, muscle and bone protested and screamed. He felt as if he were being twisted and wrenched in the grip of a powerful vise. Mabel's scream brought his pain-wracked face up in her direction. He could see the horror in her eyes.

"Whit! Whit! You're shrinking..."

Whit caught a glimpse of Davis'

face. Triumph was in the crazy eyes. Whit knew the effects of the needle were instantaneous. A matter of seconds and he would be harmless, the gun as heavy as a cannon.

It took both hands to pull the trigger. Davis stumbled forward a step, lurched, and fell on his face. A dark pool spread from under his body. Davis would never fill another needle.

There was a wild roar from the water's edge, a sound of thunder. Both Whit and Mabel gasped at what they saw coming toward them. There was no mistaking the figure of Neptune.

He advanced up the beach until he was standing at the girl's side. His voice was firm, commanding, wanting to know what had happened to his daughter.

"Quickly, Father Neptune! Do something. He saved my life but look at him."

The bearded god turned toward Whit. Suddenly the trident Neptune carried was raised aloft. Instantly all pain ceased. The pressure of the vise was gone.

"Come, my child," Neptune said. "I have been worried about you." He placed his hand on her shoulder and in a twinkling she was transformed. Her clothes fell from her, her body shrank to the size Whit had first remembered, and a slender, sinuous tail moved back and forth.

The old man and his tiny burden moved toward the water.

"Mabel... Mabel! Wait!"

Neptune stopped and brought the tiny figure close to his ear. His head shook a couple of times. "What is it, mortal?" he asked.

"Don't take her from me. I love her. Can you understand that?"

"It has happened before, in the long ago. She wants to know about Janice, about your inheritance."

"Janice can have the whole store,

and S. B. Peyton, too. I want you. Nothing else..."

Once more Neptune waved his trident. There was a rush of wind, a sudden whirling movement of which Whit was the center, then the smiling, exciting mouth of the girl was before him.

Mabel looked down and he followed the direction of her glance. Swinging where his feet should have been, hung a lovely iridescent tail.

Whit's eyes filled with laughter. "Honey. There was one thing I forgot to tell you. I'm going to make a

heck of a merman. I can't swim."

"Swim? I'll teach you how, after I've taught you other things," she said.

He wondered what she meant. Then her lips were on his and he knew what other things. Above, as high seemingly as the clouds, Neptune's face towered. And from the bull throat came a wild sea chanty. But just below the beard, two tiny creatures clung in embrace so close even their tails seemed one.

Whit sighed. "Let's not learn to swim. This is so much more fun."

Her lips gave him the answer he wanted.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

By
SANDY MILLER

THE COCKTAIL party for the new author had degenerated—as all of them do—into little groups and cliques of people, boring each other with drab shop talk and stale anecdote.

Larry McKean picked up a fresh drink from a serving tray and wandered through the french doors onto the terrace. The cool night air felt good after the overheated warmth of the apartment. The sky was alive with a million stars. Larry looked up and sighed. Time and space, he thought, what are you.

"Pardon me," he managed to get out hastily as he almost knocked the drink from the hand of a person whom he stumbled against in the darkness. He stepped back.

"That's all right," a musical voice laughed. Larry saw that it was a girl, a striking beauty with long black hair, unbowed to the fashion, wearing a low-cut evening gown and looking altogether utterly charming.

"It was my fault," she said laughing, "when I come out for air I should look where I'm going."

"Uh-huh," Larry disagreed. "But I think this is a perfect way to meet. I'm Larry McClean, English department at State. And you—?"

"Martha Freeman, math department at State."

"Why haven't we met before?" Larry asked, steering her toward the rail on the parapet.

"Evidently you people find math too boring," the girl said, humor in her eyes.

"Not any more," Larry came back, "tell me all about the fourth dimension. I'll listen for hours."

He saw the girl suddenly stiffen at his mention of the phrase "fourth dimension." The smile went from her face.

"Why do you joke about the fourth dimension?" she asked and Larry thought he detected a note of pathetic curiosity in her voice.

"Doesn't everyone?" Larry countered, rather puzzled to find a beautiful girl taking such things seriously.

"No," the girl replied sadly, "not everyone. I don't for one."

"I don't even understand it," Larry said. "So I've stopped joking. Now tell me about it."

"You must have heard all the analogies," the girl said. "You must know that fourth-dimensional people can go through matter as easily as you—as easily as three-dimensional people draw a circle, that is, when they want to."

Larry had had a bit to drink and he knew he wasn't at his sharpest, but the whole point of this inane conversation escaped him. He wondered whether it was the girl or the liquor.

"You know," he said musingly, "if I hadn't had five Martinis, I'd swear that I was sober. I'm sure I heard you speak just as if you were out of this world. Which you are—" he added hastily.

"Yes," she said, her calm, sweet face composed, "you're right. I am out of this world."

Larry stepped closer to her and his arm, bolstered by the Martinis, reached out to encircle her waist. "Don't worry about a thing, baby," he said somewhat thickly, "I'm—"

He broke off, for the girl whirled from his intended embrace.

He looked up and saw her walk rapidly toward the doors. She didn't pause before the french doors though both were closed.

Larry blinked his eyes, twice, rapidly. *The girl walked through the unopened doors...*

The LAUGHING DEATH

By Alexander Blade

Space travel at best is not funny. And yet these men were laughing themselves to death! . . .

HE SAID: "... Therefore, because it is the most dangerous mission any of you are ever likely to be on, I want to impress on your minds this thought. There must

be no discussion of this, not even among yourselves, for safety's sake."

He caught the look in his son's eyes. There was pride and eagerness in them, the desire to serve... And sud-



Even among the horror of this
carnage, his own laughter was
the most horrible thing of all



denly anger burned in his breast. Idiots all! Damn them. Damn his son most of all. They were all mad. Well, he'd soon put an end to it.

A crafty smile came to his mouth, in his eyes. Brittle laughter bubbled out of him, died on a high note. He saw the startled, frightened looks on their faces....

And James Miden jerked the pistol free, took swift aim and shot his father between the eyes....

Colonel Haynes stopped his pacing before the uniformed flier standing with his back to the wide window. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, son. Your father and I were old friends. We went through many things together."

"I know, sir," Captain James Miden said. There wasn't much else to say.

The Colonel sighed. "He would rather have gone out facing the enemy."

"We all want to go that way," the other said. He hoped it would end soon and then maybe he could go somewhere and be alone.

"But to die with the 'laughing madness' in his brain...."

"I—think he died before it had more than begun."

Colonel Haynes threw the boy a sharp look. Good Heavens! A hell of a thing to do, keep reminding young Miden about it. He doesn't look good, either. Better give him liberty, enough until he can get over it.

"Captain. This is an order. Forty-eight hours off base, in civvies. Get drunk; go out and have fun. One thing. You do him a favor. Keep that in mind!"

"Yes, sir. And thank you, sir." Miden saluted and walked past the Colonel.

The door closed softly behind him. Colonel Haynes stared emptily into the dim-lit avenue below. What was it

the people called it? 'The Laughing Death'. That was it. He wondered who among them was to feel its bite next....

THERE WAS a party going on in the next booth. He could hear the sounds of women's voices and the heavier voices of men. Now and then there was a tinkling, as of a bottle rapping the edge of a glass. But the curtain between them muted the sounds and after a while he forgot them.

The whiskey was losing its bite. And he was still sober. Sober as the waiter's face. Sober as the 'Gloomy Gus' patrol which had just entered the room. He watched the four men as they made the rounds of the patrons and admired the way they worked.

One of the patrol asked for identity tickets. The other three stood with their backs to one another, their fingers pressed lightly on the triggers of their guns. They covered the whole room. As soon as the free man was done with his questioning they moved to another party, another booth.

Then the leader of the patrol was bending over his table.

"Your identity ticket, please...."

Miden opened his wallet and showed his privilege pass.

"Thank you, sir. A laughing man escaped custody a short while ago. Headed this way."

"I see," Miden said. "I hope you get him."

"We will, sir. You know how it is, though. He might be okay for a couple of hours or he might go off his top in a matter of seconds. Got to get to him before he hurts someone." The patrol leader touched the peak of his cap and motioned for his men to follow him to the next booth.

"Another drink, sir?"

Miden looked up in sudden sur-

prise. He hadn't heard the waiter approach. "Yes. Might as well."

The waiter lifted the ash tray, dumped the contents to the floor, wiped the ash tray and put it back on the cloth. His lip curled. "Huh! Noseys! Gloomy Guses... They didn't bother you, did they, sir?"

"It wasn't a bother. They've got a job to do," Miden said.

"Yeah. So've we all. Blasted war! Think it might end soon, sir? Nast buggers, those Martians."

Miden looked at the gaunt, seamed face above him and wondered what he had to worry about. Too old for active service, no vocation, no aptitude for war work. Waiting was all he could do...

"...My drink, waiter..."

"Yes, sir! Right up."

The four-man patrol crossed his line of vision, passed out the door. The hush which had fallen on their entrance was broken with their exit. The dull monotone of talk swept the room. Miden listened and wondered. No animation in any of the faces or voices. Behind the voices lay the same unspoken fear. The laughing death. No one dared laugh, or even smile. The whole world had lost its humor. For even to smile could mean instant death.

Miden sighed and thought he was a fool. Might as well have stayed on base. Abruptly, he became aware of a woman's voice:

"...Be nice. Please!"

"...Aah. Come on. Give a man a kiss, baby." A thick voice replied.

"No! And if you don't stop. I'll leave."

"...The hell you will!" the man said.

There was the sudden sound of a struggle, the frantic sound of a woman's voice, using futile words, and the panting sound of a man intent on lust.

MIDEN SPREAD the curtain, narrowed his eyes and peered into the booth. The single neorescent bulb had been turned low. A man and woman sat side by side in the far end of the booth. The man was sprawled across the table, the woman sat with her head back against the head rest, her eyes closed. A thick-shouldered man was trying to wrestle a girl over the table to his side. It was the girl who was making the frightened sounds, the man, the panting animal ones.

As Miden reached out to grab the man he noticed a slit in the curtain facing his booth; he could see the gleam of light beyond. Then his fingers were gripping the cloth and he was heaving backward on braced legs.

Miden caught a glimpse of a fleshy face, eyes half-hidden beneath leaden lids, and last, the bottle clutched in the man's hand. He ducked in time, and brought up a knee to feel it drive home where he wanted it to. The man grunted sourly, slumped, and Miden hit him with a chopping right. The man skidded across the floor and landed against a table, knocking it down.

Miden didn't wait. He reached in again, grabbed the girl's wrist and yanked her out. They reached the door before the other managed to disentangle himself...

She sat with eyes closed, her head pressed against the upholstery of the cab. Miden watched her. "Feel better now?" he asked.

She opened her eyes. He couldn't see them but judged they were blue. She had blonde hair; they should be blue.

"Yes. Yes, I feel better. I didn't think he would get nasty."

"Obviously."

Her eyes went wide then closed until he couldn't see them at all. "You think I'm lying?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Is there someplace I can drop you off?"

"Anywhere. Anywhere at all. It doesn't matter."

"Well, if it doesn't matter to either of us, I was going to get something to eat. Join me?"

She seemed to be studying the line of hair at the back of the cab driver's neck. "No!" She turned slowly and looked him full in the eyes. Then: "... You were alone. I am too, now. Come up to my place."

The Colonel's orders, Miden thought. Have fun... He asked her the number. It proved to be a hotel on the near North Side....

"**H**OW COME you're not in the army?" she asked.

"No cream," he waved the small pitcher away. "I like my coffee black. Army? I am. Air corp."

Her mouth formed an O. He thought how pleasant her lips would be to kiss. They were so full, so red. She poured cream into her cup then took the pitcher away. She returned a moment later bearing a small tray on which were some cold cuts and several slices of bread.

"Food! I didn't realize how hungry I was," she said.

He took a sandwich, munched on it and watched her. She had changed into a housecoat shortly after they arrived. He had made himself comfortable on the sofa while she busied herself in the tiny kitchen adjoining the other room of the apartment. He gathered the sofa was also the bed.

She swallowed the last of her sandwich, found a few crumbs on the plate and licked them from her fingers. "That was good," she said. "Air corp, huh? You gave me the idea you were a flyer. They take them young, alert. Like yourself."

"How do you know how they like them?" he asked.

Her eyes fell. He got the impression she was studying him from behind the lids. "You've been dying to ask me, haven't you? But you don't know how. Well, I'll tell you. I am what you think I am. Satisfied?"

He felt heat flood his face. He *had* thought he was playing the wise one. Dumb of him. "Don't get mad!" he said. "It's the way things are."

"A fat lot you know how things are," she said. Her voice was flat. "About twenty five; been in maybe eight years now. Maybe nine. Maybe you've been on a hundred missions..."

"A hundred and fifty. And I'm twenty six. So what?"

"So nothing. You couldn't understand! Why don't you finish your coffee and get the hell out of here."

"I can do that without finishing."

"Then do it!"

"Okay!" He slammed the cup down, the brown liquid sloshing the table, and got to his feet. She watched him, wide-eyed. He got to the door and felt, rather than heard her. Her fingers were on his arm. He turned and her arms went around his neck, her lips were sucking at his, her body was pressing tight to his own...

There were steps inside his belly. Something kept trotting lightly up and down those steps. His collar felt tight, there was a thickness in his throat. He kept looking at her but she was moving away from him. She looked at him over her shoulder.

"Well...?"

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"I didn't want you to leave without learning a little..." she paused. "... About a woman like myself."

"Okay!" he growled thickly. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

She fell on the sofa, patted the seat beside her. "Come here."

He walked slowly forward and sat beside her. She reached up and began to unfasten his tie. He helped her. His fingers seemed oddly stiff and he couldn't get the knot undone. She leaned back and her lips formed another O. He tore the tie loose...

SHE HAD left a note for him. It had been brief and to the point. It said she had something to do but would meet him at the corner lunch room at noon. He sat at the counter facing the windows and played with the cup of coffee before him. The clock on the wall said one fifteen...

Damn her, he thought. Then, forget her. He looked to the clock again. Sixteen after... Probably looking for business, he thought. Well, he still had twenty four hours. With that much time left on a pass you couldn't spend it in a corner lunchroom waiting for some one like Nyra Bayes. That was her name. And suddenly he felt her, smelled her, tasted her again.

He slid from the stool, paid the check and walked out into the street. He wasn't conscious that he had turned in the direction of her hotel. But when he paused before the shabby awning he knew why he had come. He had to see her again.

He walked past the desk and took the stairs up. She lived on the second floor. He made the turn in the corridor just as a man stepped from a room at the far end. He could not see the room but memory told him it was hers. He walked slowly, looking straight ahead.

There was something familiar about the man coming toward him. The drooping left shoulder, the gaunt seamed face, struck a note in Miden's mind. It came to him as he put his hand on the knob. The waiter!

The knob did not turn and he called again!

"...It's me, Jimmy Miden."

This time the knob turned. She held the door open and watched him cross the room and drop to the sofa. The room looked a little more down-at-the-heel in the afternoon light. She closed the door and faced him, her back to it.

"I waited," he said. "You didn't show."

"I was just leaving," she said. They both knew she was lying.

"Who was the man who just left your room?"

"Man...? Oh! He delivered a bottle of whiskey. I ordered."

It was on the table before him still in its wrappings. There was a newspaper beside it. The headlines were four-inch streamers; panic had struck New York City.

Milen's "Uh-hunh" committed him to nothing.

She moved briskly to the kitchen, returned in a few seconds with two glasses and took up the bottle and tore off the wrappings. The cork came out with a slight popping sound. She poured a drink for the two of them and stood before him, holding hers.

He decided blue was her best color. The suit she was wearing was a deep blue, snug in the right places, showing her best points to advantage. She was wearing lighter blue shoes and a matching handbag lay on the table. Her hair was piled in a heavy braid. Her eyes in the light of the day were ice-blue.

"Do I look the same?" she asked. Her eyes probed his over the rim of the glass.

He sighed. "Yes. Even more beautiful."

"Then I'm forgiven...?"

"You knew I'd come," he grunted.

"I was here, wasn't I?"

"But not because you were expecting me."

Anger always lay close to the sur-

face with her. "Let's get something straight!" she snapped. "You did me a favor last night. Don't try to run my life because of it. You walked in, you can walk out."

"You know I can't do that," he said. His face had drained of color. Even his lips were a pale line across the lower jaw.

Her head moved slightly in a satisfied nod. She said, "Don't tell me that. You're a flier and on a forty-eight hour pass. You've got to go back to your base or they'll come and get you. That's what you said last night. There's nothing I can do about that."

"I can get an extension. A week..."

"A week, a month, it makes no difference. You always have to go back. Then one day you're transferred to active duty and I don't see you again. Sorry!" She made it sound final.

He drained the glass of whiskey, rose and stepped to her. He took the glass from her fingers put it on the table then put his arms around her yielding body and kissed her. Her mouth was a flame and her body an altar.

After a while he said: "I haven't stopped thinking about you for a single second. You know that." It was a statement. "I can get leave every night."

Her sigh against his cheek was as light as a cobweb's touch. "I just didn't want to get involved again," she said.

HIS SIGH echoed hers. There were sudden lines in his young face as he pulled it back. They hadn't been there before. She was sure of it. They were the lines pain etches into the skin.

"Nyra... Do you always order your whiskey from a tavern a mile from your hotel when there's a package store on the corner?"

This time she jerked away from him. He stood facing her, his hands at

his side, his dark eyes brooding.

"You think I'm lying...?"

He was patient: "The man who delivered the whiskey was our waiter at the tavern. There was a man sitting opposite at the lunchroom. He was reading a paper. I couldn't see his face. But I saw a peculiar scar on his hand holding the paper. I didn't see the face of the man drunk across the table. But I saw his hand shielding it. The same scar. There was a slit in the curtain of your booth. The big guy you were with knew who was in that booth. Well, Nyra...?"

Her face was the color of cold wax. The blue clothes and accessories no longer looked pretty. She took a couple of backward steps. "All right. Think anything you want. I don't know what you're talking about."

His lips were dry and the words came a little thickly: "I killed my father early last night. He was briefing a group of us on a mission we will go on. He was proud of me, proud that his son had been selected to go on this mission. I saw it in his eyes a second before the Laughing Death struck him. He was reaching for the gun in his drawer. I saw the sudden look of hate and I knew I had to kill him before... Nyra! I love you. Understand? And I'd kill you just as quickly."

He thought she was going to faint. Her eyes closed and she swayed for an instant. But before he could reach for her she had recovered.

"Let's—let's sit for a minute, Jimmy," she said.

He stood, afraid that if he sat at her side what was in him would resolve into weakness at the touch of her. He had to be strong.

"I've got to tell you something, Jimmy," she said. "A year or so back I was in a party; a couple of airmen, myself and another girl and a man—

you saw him last night. The fat man. There was an argument and someone stuck a knife into one of the fliers. Killed him. The fat man got me away. The other girl was a pick-up they had when they met me.

"I was in a terrible spot. If I gave myself up the least they would do would be to take away my yellow ticket, my identity. Without it I would be picked up every night by a patrol, maybe sent to a work camp. The fat man knew it. His silence was my pay and still is. I don't know who he is, but he knew you would be in last night. Don't ask me how he knew. He knows a great deal. And I'm afraid of him. More than anyone or anything else in this world. There are times I wish the Death would hit me while I was with him..."

"The whole thing was arranged then?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes. I said he knew you were coming."

"I could buy that. But what was he going to get out of me?"

She had regained her composure. "When he gets drunk he talks a little. Like last night. He said you and five others had been picked for a special mission. He wanted to know what that mission was."

He put his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels. His eyes searched the ceiling for an answer. "This fat friend of yours is a sort of miracle-man. He knows everything. Including something it was impossible for him to know. That I would fall for you."

SHE SHOOK her head. "He has never made a mistake. I know everything there is to be known about you. The whiskey you drink, for instance. About the affair you had when you were sixteen, the only time you had anything to do with a girl. I know what food you like, who your friends

are, what your favorite sport is..."

"Food? I don't have any dislikes or favorites."

"You hate liverwurst and love French apple pie..." The startled look in his eyes showed she had scored a bull's eye. "...The fat man knew what would happen between us only he gave me more time. The business was to take about a week. Then I was to play you for what you knew."

"I'll believe everything you've said. Just tell me how he knew I was coming to *that* tavern last night."

"You killed your father at about five. At nine after Colonel Haynes gave you leave, you left the Flight Building on La Salle Street by the Jackson entrance. You started to walk east. A cab pulled up; it had been cruising behind you. You told the driver to take you to a tavern, any one..."

She didn't have to go on. She had been right to the last detail. She jumped as he slammed a fist home in a palm. His anger was so great she feared he was going to attack her.

"Okay. So he's a spy and a damned smart one. We've fought them to a standstill except for the Laughing Death. Well, maybe we'll beat them on that deal soon, too. Yes. I think we will."

"Jimmy... What about-what about us?"

"Us?"

"You said you loved me."

"I loved my father."

"But that was different..."

"Yes it was. He didn't know what he was going to do."

There was no question of his meaning. He might as well have struck her. She shrank against the arm of the sofa. Her voice was as dead as her eyes: "Go ahead. Turn me in. There is nothing I can do."

"Don't be a fool," he spoke dispassionately. "If I turn you in there's nothing gained. The fat boy will know his game is over with me and try something else. We'll play it all the way to the hilt. All the way. I'm the sucker who rescued you. I'll play it that way."

"No!"

"Yes. The trouble with guys like the fat man they sometimes forget others have brains. Maybe even guys like myself. So here's how we'll do it. I'll get leave every night. And see you each night. In a week you'll report to the fat man that I'm hooked. Then we'll really get to work."

He bent, poured another drink for himself and downed it in a single swallow. It could have been mockery in his eyes. "Before you hang up the love sign for me again let's get something straight about that, too. A year after my puppy love affair I was in the air corps. After that, love, like our beer and smokes, was something the corps furnished us on our leaves from action. Free, for officers. Well, maybe it's something else too. Maybe it's hunger and desire, and wanting just to see cold blue eyes and feel warm red lips. See. Now I'm making speeches."

"You mean," she said, "that it was all an act with you?"

"It was with you," he reminded her.

"Oh-h!"

"Yeah. I, uh, have something to do. See you tonight..."

Five minutes went by after he left before she got up from the sofa. She moved slowly to the telephone and called a number. A man answered. "He's on the hook," she said, and hung up.

"SO YOU fellas are going to end the war real quick, now, eh?" the fat man asked.

"Yeah," Jimmy replied. "About

time, too. We've got something good up our sleeves. Secret..." He hiccuped, turned to Nyra at his side and said: "Excuse me, honey. Must be the water they serve with the whiskey."

"Jimmy," she said. "Don't you think you've had enough?"

"'Nough? Don't be silly. They teach us to drink, in the air corps. Man can't drink a fi't; man can't fly. Rules."

"He's all right, Nyra," the fat man said. "So it's a secret."

"What's a secret?" Jimmy asked.

"This new weapon we're going to shoot at the damned Martians."

"Can't shoot nothin' at 'em. They got ray umbrella. Nothin' gets through. Suicide trying. We got one too, now. Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles—all big cities. Can't get through ours, either. Stalemate. They got Laughing machine, though. Smart boys, those Martians."

"Yes. The papers are full of it. Terrible thing last week, in New York. Panic, and a hundred thousand people died. Terrible."

"Hey! I got good idea. Let's drink toast to new weapon. We ain't drunk enough toasts tonight. Waiter..."

The fat man almost smiled. "But we can't drink a toast to it unless we know what it is."

"No toast? Okay. But let's have another drink anyhow."

The smile died behind the leaden lids before it came alive. He looked at Nyra, shook his head in an imperceptible signal.

"Jimmy," Nyra said. "I'm tired. Take me home, please."

"Tired? So soon? Okay, honey. Nice meeting you, mister..."

"Ellin..."

"...Ellin. Shorry I had to clip you last week. Nyra tells me wash all a mistake. Be seein' you, sir."

"Yes. We will see each other soon,"

Ellin promised.

"HOW WAS I?" Jimmy asked dryly.

"Very good. You would have fooled me."

"But did I fool him?"

Nyra shook her head. "I don't know. I don't know what goes on in his mind."

"H'mm! I think he was taken in."

"Why do we have to go through all this? He's a Martian spy. I'll swear it. Isn't that the simple way?"

"It would never work. Your word against his. We couldn't prove it. Besides, he would drag in the dead flyer and you would be on the fire. No. We'll give him enough rope. He'll hang himself."

"And maybe you," she warned him.

"Then we'll hang together."

"Let's talk about something else," she shuddered as if taken with a sudden chill. Her eyes were bright, dancing. "Y'know, Jimmy. Sometimes I smile to myself. I mean when I'm alone at night. Just to feel what it's like. And once, when my hand slipped and I smeared my lipstick, I laughed aloud..."

He stopped in the act of pouring cream in her coffee. Quite suddenly the lines were gone from his face. He looked like a boy watching a miracle take place.

"...I'll never do it again," she continued. "I could never stand the terrible wait, wondering whether the Death was going to take me."

He finished pouring the cream. "Have you noticed," he said as he handed her the cup of coffee, "that there has been no mention of the Laughing Death in the papers during the last week?"

"No."

"I got the story today from Staff Information. A week ago today there

was panic in New York. You read of it; it was in all the papers. Up to now the Death has been hitting individuals only. Something about no two humans having the same number of brain cells. Last week, however, twenty thousand people were affected simultaneously. Do you have any idea what that means?"

She shook her head.

"Simply this. They can concentrate the beam on any city and cause general insanity. They had found a means of getting to a collective group. Bongo! Our world goes smash. Then, suddenly, the beam went dead. No one knows about it yet. They're afraid to let the news out. It might be premature and if so the resultant disappointment would make havoc of morale. Maybe our fat friend knows why they've stopped."

"I imagine he does," she said.

"Think you can find out for me?" Jimmy asked.

"I don't know..."

"Try. It might make things go faster."

He left her on that note. And for the first time he found her lips without warmth when they kissed at the door...

THE WAITER acted as though he would have liked to sit in with them. They were all there, the fat man, the one with the scar on his hand, Nyra, and Jimmy Miden, in uniform.

"...Pretty things, those decorations," the fat man said.

Jimmy's brows lifted. "I earned them—the hard way."

"I suppose," the other said. "A funny war. Nothing happens, but we're still at war."

"Maybe it'll end soon," Jimmy said. "The last Martian on Earth was captured the other day. There isn't a spot on the globe where they can land a

ship anymore."

"So I heard," the fat man said softly.

"Shall I bring the drinks?" the waiter asked.

"Yes," Nyra said. "I feel like getting drunk tonight."

"Why?" the fat man turned to her.

"Do I have to have a reason?"

His reply was to the point: "You do."

"Well, I don't! I just feel like getting drunk."

"Oh. Miden..."

"Yes?"

"I want to warn you. She's hellish when she's drunk."

Jimmy let the remark go by. "There's been talk about our getting this secret weapon we have, off to Mars."

"And about time," the fat man sounded pious.

"There's one thing puzzles us. They've stopped beaming the Laughing Death at us and we can't figure why."

A change came over the fat man's features. They became set, a film came over the eyes, the lips tautened thinly. "Maybe I can tell you, Miden? Maybe they're waiting to find out what this weapon is? Maybe they're readying a last dose of the Death? Maybe they're waiting for the right moment, when the people are on the upswing?"

"Then they'd better hurry."

"What do you mean?"

"Sorry. Can't talk. Security reasons, you know."

"To hell with that! Talk!"

"Look, mister..." Jimmy said ominously.

"Please!" Nyra broke in.

"Keep out of this! He'll talk now. I've got him where I want him," the fat man growled. "And don't reach for your gun."

Jimmy felt the bite of the knife the other man was holding, through the cloth of his uniform. "Okay," he said lightly. "What do you want me to say?"

"Aah! Nyra, gentlemen—your drinks..." It was the waiter, in his right hand a tray holding a bottle and several glasses.

Their eyes had gone to the waiter. Jimmy acted with lightning speed. His left hand chopped down at the hand holding the knife while his right swept the bottle from the tray. It crashed and broke on the fat man's skull as Jimmy swept it downward. And once more Jimmy was dragging Nyra with him.

He didn't make it this time.

It was the waiter who stopped him. Jimmy was bent double, one hand on Nyra's wrist, when the waiter brought his knee up to the point of Jimmy's chin. He went backward and the man who had held the knife clamped a headlock on him. Jimmy didn't see who hit him. There was a bright light behind his eyes, and after, he was falling into a pool of darkness which lay just beyond his falling body.

"USE THE smelling salts," someone said.

Pain flickered in red flashes as Jimmy opened his eyes.

"...He's coming around," another voice said.

The pain was not so intense the second time. Jimmy opened his eyes. He was in Nyra's room. They were all there, even the waiter.

His lips twisted wryly. "How nice," he said. "Everybody here."

He looked down and saw the rope around his bare chest. He moved his legs and felt the bonds against them. The fat man was standing before him. There was a bandage about his skull. He was holding a vial of smelling salts

in one hand. He gave the vial to Nyra.

"Now then," the fat man said. "To the unfinished business. What kind of secret weapon are they flying to Mars?"

Jimmy told the fat man where to go. He sighed deeply, shudderingly as something burned the flesh on his back.

"What kind of weapon and when...?"

Jimmy tried to wet his lips but his tongue seemed as dry as his mouth.

"Give him some water," the fat man said.

The waiter stepped into the kitchen returned with a glass of water and hurled the contents into Jimmy's face.

"Talk, Miden," the fat man said. "You won't die. But you will wish you could."

"They tell me a man can go crazy with pain," Jimmy said. "I won't make sense then."

"Nyra! Come here!" the fat man said.

Before she could do more than protest he had seized her by her hair and forced her to her knees, facing Jimmy. "Andre! The iron..."

Jimmy saw what had burned him, when Andre passed him. The man was carrying a soldering iron with an extra-long cord.

The fat man bent and with a single motion tore the clothes from Nyra's upper body from her. The pink flesh, warm, breathtaking in its loveliness was exposed.

"Andre," the fat man was suddenly hoarse, excited. "Show Miden how you will go to work on him."

The iron was inches from her body when Jimmy bellowed: "Wait! I'll talk."

"Yes..." the fat man sounded as though he didn't want Jimmy to talk. His eyes were intent on the exposed body of the woman.

"They're flying tonight. Five of them. Special planes. There's a cone of light in the cowl of each plane. I don't know what it is but it can crack the ray umbrella they've set up on Mars. Whatever's in that cone will burn the planet to a crisp. And maybe the five planes with it."

"What time and how is it you're not with them?"

"They know about you, Ellin," Jimmy continued. "I told them. I was playing decoy tonight."

"What time are they leaving?" the fat man screeched.

"What time is it now?"

"Ten."

"At midnight."

"Ask him," Nyra's voice was quite calm, "why he's in uniform tonight."

"Of course," the fat man slapped his palm. "He's going too. Or was. He just wanted to play games tonight. Good! We'll help him. He'll still go. And we'll go with him."

But Jimmy was watching Nyra. She had gotten to her feet, stepped to the closet and pulled a blouse from a hanger and had donned it. She was smiling broadly into his eyes.

"Aren't you afraid of the Death?" he asked.

"We told them to turn it off," she said, "until we got word to them about this new weapon. I can even laugh."

"Yes. I suppose you can."

"No more talk," the fat man said. "We have two hours. To the field."

"Field?" Jimmy asked.

"Where your plane is waiting."

"But it's a military field."

"We know. They will let us in. We have friends there."

THERE WERE two guards at the far gate. They let them in without question and marched at Jimmy's side. The space ship gleamed silver in the light of the searchlight. The two

men guarding the ship suddenly shot the light out.

"Inside," the fat man said in unhurried tones. "There's room enough for all."

Andre sat at Jimmy's side in the co-pilot's seat. The waiter stood over Jimmy's shoulder, a pistol pointing to the back of the uniformed man's head. The fat man and Nyra were sprawled on the floor. The ebony of outer space enveloped the ship. A very bright star was the Earth ten million miles away.

"How much longer?" the fat man asked.

"We'll be there in about four hours," Andre answered.

"Good! I couldn't stand much of this."

"Neither can I," Nyra said. "How's our friend doing?"

"He's all right. I'll take over in another two hours. The board on this ship is the same as any other. The switches are alike. I don't want him to try a suicide crash. So we'll remove temptation from him. I'll brake it in..."

Two hours later Andre tapped Jimmy's arm. "I'll take it from here. Go on back and sit down."

"Thanks," Jimmy said. "I was getting eye-tired."

"Well. You can sleep now."

"Do me a favor," Jimmy said as he spread out opposite Nyra and the fat man. "Wake me when we come in. I'd like to see a landing on Mars."

"Don't worry. We will," the fat man said.

"**W**AKE UP, Miden," the fat man said.

Jimmy blinked the sleep from his eyes. He smiled drowsily. "We there?"

"Almost," Andre said. "Ten thousand more miles. I'm in communication with them. They're going to open the ray umbrella for us."

"Good!" the fat man said.

Jimmy thought of something, narrowed his eyes in concentration then nodded in satisfaction. He began to talk:

"You kinda fooled me at the end, Nyra."

"I fooled you all the time," she said.

"No. Just at the end. I never believed a thing you said. Not after I found out about the murdered flyer. You killed him, Nyra."

"I suppose I might as well confess. Yes, I did."

"The thing that bothered me was the description of the killer. The woman had dark hair. When you mentioned the other girl I thought it might have been her. But there was only one woman with the two men. You! When Elin pulled your head back I saw the dark hair at the roots. You're not a blonde, Nyra."

"... Ten minutes more," Andre called out.

"Blondes are cold. You should have known," she said.

"I suppose so. What are you to Elin, Nyra?"

"His wife."

"Ah."

"... Six minutes more," Andre said.

"Funny. I never thought I'd fall in love with another man's wife. Maybe it's not funny. I don't know."

"Still in love?" she asked.

He was smiling. "Guys like me fall just once. It's for good."

"A pity. I tried to act the part."

"And very well, too. It really fooled me. But the funniest thing is what keeps running through my mind."

"Save it for later," the fat man was bored.

"... My father was telling us about this mission the other fellas are on. He said there was but one drawback to it..."

"... One more minute," Andre said.

"... There was no way as yet of breaking through the ray umbrella over Mars. When that problem was solved we could go on. Then the Laughing Death hit him. I think he'd have been proud to know how I solved that problem."

"... Sky brake's on," Andre announced as he flipped the switch. He was grinning widely as he set the automatic pilot to position and came back to join the others.

"A little too late," the fat man said. "Those other ships will evaporate in the rays. Just like all the Earth ships do. All but this one. They're opening the umbrella to let us through, right now."

"I know," Jimmy said. He seemed quite pleased with himself. "I thought of the plan the day I told you I had recognized the waiter and the man with the scar on his hand. Remember, Nyra?"

"How can I forget?" she said. She was as bored as her husband.

"So I thought. If I can get these people to believe I'll fall in with them, string them along certain things will come to pass. I was right. Even to being kidnapped on this ship. Oh, by the way. This ship doesn't have the cone. None of them do."

"What do you mean, none of them? We knew this one didn't. One of the mechanics told us," the fat man said.

"He did. Bright fella. Only this isn't the ship he saw. This is that one's mate. This one has two engines. I better talk faster. We'll be landing soon... The second engine is really the most powerful broadcasting station the world has ever known. It is broadcasting right now. We had transcrip-

tions of the sounds which cause the Laughing Death. Yes. We managed to make transcriptions of those sounds. They are being broadcast on Mars right now. The same rays as carry them to Earth will carry them to Mars. Our transmitter is not as powerful as yours. It can only operate in a short distance. It can..." Jimmy wet his lips. He wasn't making sense. Repeating the same things over and over. He felt a giggle in his throat but held it back.

"You're—lying," the fat man said breathlessly.

"No! Not now. I even figured someone like Andre might be along. The brake switch turned on the power for the transmitter. It won't be long. The other fellas will have a field day. They'll wait until the ray umbrella goes off. Crazy people do crazy things. Ha-ha. Oh, this is so damned funny."

Their eyes were wide and staring as Jimmy began to rock in wild laughter. Suddenly his laughter ended on a high sustained note. Saliva dripped from his mouth. He snarled and lunged at Nyra, his hand clutching for her throat.

She screamed and rolled from him.

There was a roaring sound and Jimmy sprawled lifeless at her feet. She looked up at Andre, a pistol in his hand.

"Thanks, Andre," she said. "Another second..."

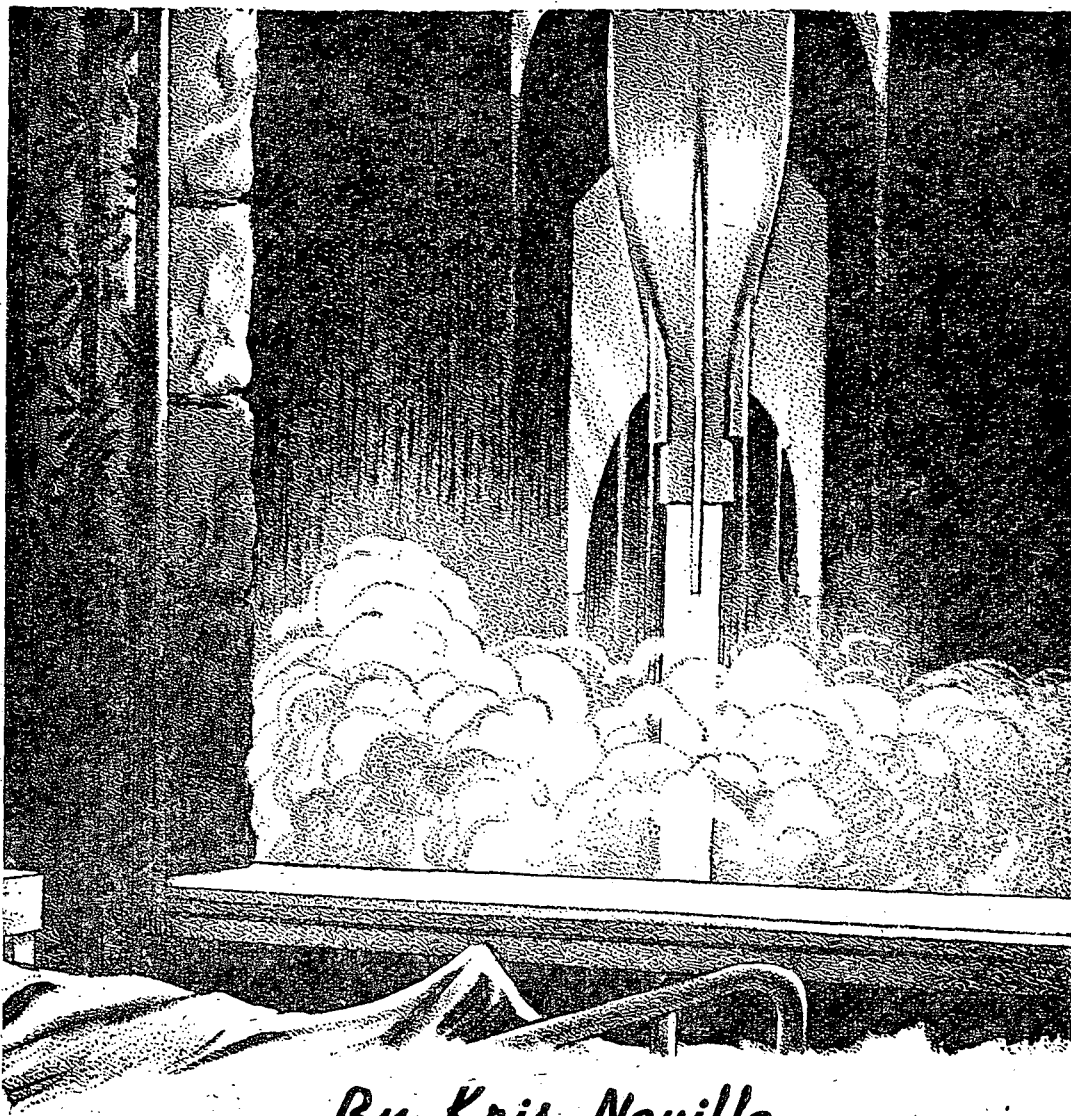
Laughter gurgled from Andre's lips. It ended on a high note. There were three more shots. Andre was still laughing as he opened the hatch. A horde of screaming, laughing Martians pulled him from the plane and tore him to pieces, laughing insanely as they did...

THE END

ONE LEG IS ENOUGH

The planets wanted men, and Al Lyons wanted those planets. But how could he be of any use up there as only half a man?





By Kris Neville

A FIRE-FLASH from Richardson Field illuminated his room. After a moment he heard the hissing roar of the rocket as it hurtled skyward.

That was the fifth one this month.

He lay between the crisp, cool sheets and stared out through the window. They're probably shooting for Venus again, he thought.

He felt his self-imposed isolation acutely. At night it was the worst;

that was why he had demanded that they take the television set out of his room: for fear that, in a moment of midnight weakness, he would turn it on to try to find out what was happening. During the day, it was easier; whenever Doctor or Nurse tried to volunteer information, he could cut them short with a half animal snarl. But at night, when he was alone...

One of the most important things in the world was that he go on *not*

caring; that gave him a solid rock to cling to. He repeated over and over to himself, "I don't care what they're doing."

But the fifth already this month!

No. He didn't give a damn about it; he was too proud to give a damn; he would lay here and die without giving a damn.

Every night he promised himself that he would ask Nurse to transfer him to the other wing, first thing in the morning, where he wouldn't even be able to see the rocket fire. But every morning he always found a reason to postpone the request for one more day. Deep inside he knew that he did not want to transfer rooms. Each fire-flash sent him wallowing in a wave of self-pity, and it was like a drug.

Nurse had said something about that the other day.

He could remember her words quite clearly, just as she had spoken them. Of late, he had discovered that his memory was very good.

"You don't want to get well, Al," she had said. "You lay here and feel sorry for yourself, and you don't want to get well. That's your trouble."

Well, he told himself, suppose I don't want to get well. If I don't want to get well, that's my own business.

He turned his face into the pillow.

Not to me, he shrieked mentally. *Not to me!* Such things are bound to happen when men and machinery mix; but always to the other guy. Not to me.

For six months he had lain between the white sheets of the hospital bed, studying the ceiling during the day and tossing restlessly at night, waiting with a wild mixture of emotions, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, pity, contempt, for a rocket flash to light his room and announce that another ship had headed outward.

And more and more as he lay there, he found escape from the oppression of his room in memory. . . .

"**H**OW'S THE patient today?" Doctor asked.

"Still alive, I guess."

Doctor made professional motions with his hands. "Sleep well last night?"

"So-so."

"Noticed the leg lately?"

(Remembering that question, Al winced. The leg wasn't there anymore, but for the first month after they had amputated, he had been kept awake most of the time because he could feel a cramp in it.)

"No," he said sullenly.

Quit thinking about it, he told himself. Think of something pleasant. . . .

HE CAME out of Hanger, 5 and started toward the Rec hall.

"Hey, Al!"

"Yeah?"

"Old Man wants to see you."

"What's he want?"

"Didn't say."

"Well, thanks. . . . Thanks, Jerry. Guess I better go see."

Al heard his feet clip-clop hollowly. It was nice to walk, to feel the free and easy sway as the legs moved like pistons.

"Al Lyons," he told the Space corporal at the reception desk.

"Lyons, eh?" The corporal eyed him. "Go on in."

The Old Man was a Space Service captain. He was a big, friendly man who realized that the civilian maintenance crews really *were* civilians. The men in 314 all swore by him.

"Oh? Come in, young fellow."

"I'm Al Lyons, sir. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. Indeed I did. Glad you could come right over. Take a chair."

Al sat down.

"I believe you submitted an application last year for Space School."

"Yes, yes, sir," Al gulped.

The Old Man smiled. "Well, I got the report on it this morning."

Al Lyons could feel the sweat break out on the palms of his hands. "Yes, sir?"

The Old Man stood up and came around the desk. He extended his hand.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you."

"You mean....you mean....I made it?" There was disbelief in his voice.

The Old Man was pumping his hand. "First quintile. Leave Richardson Field Monday for Seaton."

Al Lyons tried to think of something to say. He told himself that he was a grown man, now. "Well, I'll be damned," he said.

But that was what he was trying to forget; everything connected with the Space Service. He tossed restlessly in his bed.

His mind, too, refused to be still....

WHEN HE stepped off the night train (which had made a special stop) at the railroad siding and passenger depot, the air of the desert almost took his breath away. The stars, overhead, were pin pricks of brilliance set against an inconceivably vast loneliness.

He could see, by sallow moonglow, the double spur lines stretch away across the desert to Richardson Field, New Mexico. No cars stood now on the lines. It was the weekend. The depot itself, an Army unit, was lifeless.

He had wired, according to instructions, and he had expected someone to meet him. Now, being away from home for the first time, he felt small and isolated.

For five or ten minutes he walked

around the depot. After that, he sat down on the rough boards of the cargo platform to wait.

He swung his legs.

After half an hour alone with the stars and the flat, white sands, he saw the lights of a car creeping toward him along a darker ribbon that was the asphalt road. The twin headlights grew larger and larger until finally the car, a new jeep, rattled up to the depot.

The driver cut the engine.

"You the man for 314?"

"Yes. Yes, sir," Al Lyons called.

"Grab your gear, kid, and let's go."

Al Lyons picked up his two suitcases and walked over to the jeep.

"Toss 'em in back."

He did and then climbed into the car.

The driver started the engine, shifted, sent the jeep leaping backwards, spun it around in a tight circle, and headed toward the distant lights.

After a while, the driver said, "Been waiting long?"

"Not very."

"Sorry. These don't go as fast as I thought. Should have been here twenty minutes ago."

"That's okay."

There was silence again. Then:

"What's your name, kid?"

"Al Lyons."

"Al, eh? Where from?"

"Ohio."

The driver grunted.

"What's your name?" Al Lyons asked.

"Willie. Willie Cord."

Al Lyons nodded. "What do you do out here, Willie?"

"Pilot."

"Jets?"

"Space."

"Space?" Al Lyons gasped. "You mean a *space* pilot came all the way over here just to pick me up?"

WILLIE CORD studied the road ahead. "Might as well. We're blasting in another couple of hours. Didn't have anything else to do to kill time."

Al Lyons said, "Oh." He, too, studied the road.

"Been in long?"

"Eight years at it—almost from the first."

"Then you must have known Richardson?"

".... Yeah. Used to get drunk with him.... Crazy guy.... Wild...."

Al Lyons decided that wasn't any way to talk about a hero.

"Told him, Rick, quit. Quit while you're winning. You got to the Rock. Let someone else try Venus."

Willie Cord clamped his jaw.

"Nope. Said he was lucky." Willie Lord smiled grimly. "He was wrong."

"What do you think—happened?"

Willie Cord shrugged. "Cracked up landing. Any of a million things. Can't tell...."

Al Lyons kept silent for a mile. Then he asked:

"What do you think of Seaton?"

Willie Cord considered this. "A grind...."

"You go four years. Okay. You get out. An engineer. If you're lucky, a pilot's job, like mine. Otherwise: Lug you up to Mars.... or the Rock. You dig ditches, or set on your fanny, or map terrain. Or look for uranium. All comes to the same thing...."

"I hauled up the first graduates last years. Eager kids, all excited. Dumped 'em on Mars. What the hell. Nothing to do. All there is is Marsport: a dome a quarter mile across: fifty men. A year at a stretch. Living like dogs. Sit around, play cards, cuss, talk about dames."

"But to be on *Mars*," Al Lyons protested. "That must be something. Exciting, just to be there."

"Better than the Rock, maybe, but

exciting, no.... On the Rock you really work. Putting up the damn rocket base for the Army or the damn telescope for the astronomers. Army don't need the base and the astronomers don't need the 'scope. But you bust a gut for them, just the same.... On Mars, better, in a way. Don't do nothing but set, most of the time. Exciting, hell no. To be on Mars.... kid dreams.... as the Congress will tell you: they cut our appropriations one more time; and *we* won't be there."

"But someday there'll be a giant dome, miles and miles across, and people can live under it almost as comfortably as they live here...."

"Not in our times, kid. No reason. Costs too much."

Al Lyons looked away from the road, up at the stars.

"You're wrong, Willie."

"No, kid. I'm right." He mused for a moment. "Take last trip. What did I bring back? Samples. That's all: five hundred pounds of rock. And not even a damn smell of pitchblende. Ain't no uranium on the whole damn planet. If there were, the Space Service couldn't squeeze out the money to mine it. We'd just keep it out there for a rainy day with a big 'hands off' sign on it. Hell, the boys have quit lookin'...."

—Al Lyons shook his head vigorously. "It *can't* be like that. There's something out there. I don't know what. Maybe not adventure or excitement, but something like that. It's like the sea is, to some people. You may cuss her and cuss her, but you keep going back, if only just for the sake of going."

Willie Cord smiled. "I know, kid."

AL LYONS stared at the ceiling. A man with one leg can't get into the Space Service. *A man with one leg can't ever get into the Space Service.*

And those things rolling down his cheeks weren't tears; weren't really tears. He was twenty-one, and people twenty-one don't cry.

Maybe it wasn't the thing itself; maybe it was just wanting it so bad.

When he was eleven years old, Richardson made the first trip to the Rock. But even before that, he had dreamed about going to space. When he was a little child. First he had wanted to be an explorer; go to Africa or some distant place. Later, as soon as he could really understand, the longing had transferred from Africa to the Moon, and after that, to the planets themselves; as they came within the horizon of possibility.

He had taken a job in civilian maintenance at Richardson Field as soon as he had graduated from high school, just so he could be near the rockets. He had studied hard, after working hours, denying himself many of the pleasures of youth, and last year he had taken the Seaton tests—

He had been seventeen when Richardson tried for Venus; eighteen when Comsky first landed on Mars....

Max Comsky had been born and raised in his home town. Once, Al Lyons had actually met him. At the time, Al had been sixteen.

MAX COMSKY was a big man; sharp, bold eyes.

"The Rock, kid? Wonderful life.... Wonderful. Work, sure. But excitement, too."

Al Lyons listened open-mouthed.

"Never know what's gonna happen. Last month, ship before mine, Old Nancy they called her, busted her shielding half way in. Crew landed her, believe it or not. Half dead, all six of them, but they set her down; pretty a job as you ever hope to see, too. Every man on board radio-active,

but they got her down... Silly... Anything happen to me like that, and I'd turn the ship sunward and let her rip, hell for breakfast..."

(Max Comsky's last ship never returned, Al Lyons remembered: Lost out of Mars.)

Max was the type who loved to tell his stories of adventure in a big, booming voice, a voice you could hear all over the room. He took an animal delight in it. But, Al Lyons suspected, he was not averse to lowering his voice, on moonlight nights, in female company, to speak softly of the stars and of the strange longing....

"There was once," Max had told him, "when I went into the jet room. Operator was space sick. Out like a light. Mass needle almost to the red. Couple more minutes and we'd have gone with a bang. I slammed in the dampening rods. That threw off the pilot, who had been counting on more power. Lost our cut back drive and we slipped way inside Earth, on our way to Venus sure as God made little green apples. I had to run the room for an hour and a half. Rough! Pilot would yell through the intercom, 'Give me nine point lateral,' and I'd yell back, 'How?' and then he'd have to explain it all to me. Didn't know anything about the damn jets room...."

"That's why they're starting Seaton: so they can get somebody on those rockets who can blast with a little better than their luck and a prayer."

He had told wonderful and exciting tales, for a boy of sixteen to listen to.

"On the Rock. Out looking. Curious.... No air. You feel like you can jump a thousand feet, and the stars look like little, steady-burning electric bulbs.... It was quiet, and kinda lonely. I was on the rim of Crater 9 about a mile from the dome. All at once, I had a hell of a time

breathing. Suit was leaking.... I switched on the emergency tank of air, and I started to run, and I mean *really* run. Everytime I'd jump, I'd *float* down, and that seemed to take an eternity.... Scared? Boy! I thought sure if I ever got out of that one I'd had enough...."

AL LYONS thought about running across the surface of the Moon. Just to think of it hurt so badly that he wanted to be sick at his stomach. "God damn," he said.

Saying that didn't help very much....

Morning began to break.

He wondered if he could get some sleep. His mind began to fuzz up with fatigue....

The way it had happened. That was so unfair.

His last day of work, just before the weekend. Monday he would have gone to Seaton....

"HEY, AL, hand me that lug wrench, willya?"

Al Lyons reached out for it.

"My God! Look out!"

He tried to twist out of the way. Then he could feel the weight crash down on his leg. He could hear the excited babble of voices....

"GOD DAMN, God damn," he said to himself. "I've got to get some sleep."

Sunrise.

He slept.

At eight, Nurse came.

At ten, Doctor came.

At ten twenty-five—

"Al, there's a visitor to see you."

"Don't want to see him."

"He's coming in, Al."

Al Lyons turned over in the bed. He faced the wall. After a while he heard the voice.

"Hi, kid."

"Go 'way," he choked.

"Nope."

He heard Willie Cord draw up the chair. It squeaked under his weight.

"How's it going, kid?"

No answer.

"Just got in from Mars. Somebody told me about a kid over here. Said name of Al Lyons. I remembered: kid I lugged out here in a jeep. Come over to see if I could do something."

"Please let me alone."

"Said the kid wouldn't get well, down at the desk. Because he didn't *want* to get well."

"So what?"

"Damn childish."

"I don't care."

Willie Cord hesitated a moment.

"Thought you might like to hear something."

"No."

"Fine," Willie Cord grunted. "You're going to hear it sooner or later. Might as well hear it now. I pulled some wires for you, kid."

For a moment, Al Lyons felt his heart pound—but then, sick realization came to him. No amount of wire pulling could get a man with an artificial leg in Space Service.

"Remember I told you how there wasn't nothing on Mars? No reason to go there?"

"Well, I was wrong."

Willie Cord stopped to let that soak in.

"Remember I told you about hauling back some rock?"

Al Lyons was holding his breath now.

"Well, damn stuff was gold ore.... Rush is on....

"Friend of mine formed a company. Bert Drexal. You may have heard of him."

Al Lyons had. If Bert Drexal was in on it, it was big time.

"Mars Mines, Inc. They're putting

up a big-dome. Plenty big. And it'll get bigger. Civilian stuff, kid. And in a year, maybe two—three years at the most—they'll be needin' clerks hydroponics men, all sorts of men: civilians. One-legged ones, even, if they're willin' to work. Bert said you'd get a job, sure as hell, if you can qualify, and if you're outta that

bed. First opening they can use you."

Al Lyons was afraid to turn over; afraid Willie would see how bright his eyes were glistening.

"Gosh—" he said.

"Sound okay to you, kid?"

"Yes...."

"Yes," he answered. "I think I'd like something like that."

TWO FULL YEARS TO PAY

By
LESLIE PHELPS

JERRY RAME sipped his coffee and toyed with the button of the video. Stell, his wife, sat opposite him in their small apartment and watched him covertly.

"...and tonight the eleventh helicopter show starts," the bland announcer was saying, "and this marks a new high in American transportation. The show will present a complete picture of the development of vehicles from the ox-cart to the latest in rockets. This show is well—" Jerry jabbed the off button.

"What's the matter?" Stell asked sympathetically.

"I wish we could get a new heli," Jerry said savagely. "The buggy on the roof's falling apart."

"I do too, dear," Stell replied, "but our budget won't take it. Remember we swore we wouldn't go into debt." A faraway look came into her eyes, "But," she sighed, "I wish we could."

"You're right, Stell," Jerry agreed sadly, "we've got to watch that budget. We'll just have to make the '87 do."

He glanced at his watch. "I guess I'd better go." He started for the door toward the roof-garage. He remembered and came back to kiss Stell good-bye. "Say I've got an idea, honey," he said enthusiastically. "Let's have dinner together tonight and then go to the Heli-show. We haven't been out for a while and it won't hurt to look."

"I love you Jerry," Stell said as he gently disengaged her arms from his neck. "I'll see you tonight in the lobby about six. Take care of yourself dear."

That night the two of them finished dinner, a leisurely luxurious affair—and unaccustomed—and went over to the vast building that housed the super-Heli-show.

They found themselves in a milling mass of people surging in and out of a thousand exhibits. Here was the "Turbine Eight" a super-powerful, fast clipper whose vast rotor blades and powerful jets sent her surging through air at three hundred miles an hour. There was a little "Junior" a small electric job propeller driven, its rotors wide and a mere eight feet in length.

Jerry and Stella wandered through the technological fairyland, stopping to gape and admire, inspect and question, avoiding

the provocative and engaging offers of the barkers and the salesmen. "Come and get it, folks. This super-beauty can be yours for your old job as a down payment and twelve credits a month. Two full years to pay. Ride America's finest. Heli down to Buenos Aires for the summer. Economy and comfort."

The words and catch-calls tumbled from the sellers.

Then Jerry and Stell spotted their dream. It wasn't particularly big nor powerful, but there was a sleek grace and visible beauty in the medium priced "Tornado".

"Oh, honey," Stell breathed in Jerry's ear. "I wish we owned that."

Jerry squeezed her arm. "I know," he said breathlessly, "I feel the same way. But remember what you said about the budget?"

Stell sighed. "Yes, I know. We can't afford it," she said resignedly.

The two wandered around for a while not saying much, their minds still filled with the trim picture of the "Tornado".

They were walking toward the exits bound for the roof-lots finally.

"Stell?" Jerry said softly, his arm around her waist.

"Yes?" Stell answered quietly.

"Maybe we could."

"Maybe we could what?"

"You know. Two full years to pay."

"What about the budget?"

"The hell with the budget. Think about our old crate."

"I have—and I don't like it."

"Well?"

"All right—if it's all right with you."

"It is."

"Me too."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

Abruptly the two of them turned around and precisely like Americans have done for a hundred years they went back and bought the latest model "Tornado", the newest in the medium price range helicopter. And they didn't worry about the budget any longer because they knew that somehow they'd make out. And Stell and Jerry drove home that night in a beautiful craft whose quiet blades purred overhead carrying them on to further dreams...



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted By **ROG PHILLIPS**

I'M THINKING of trying a new system of conducting the *Club House*. We'll see how it goes. Instead of just sending in your fanzine for review, if you would like to write your own review and send it in with the fanzine, I'll insert it as is, with an occasional addition to it of my own if I see something in the fanzine that I would like to comment on; or, if space is limited on the month it's to appear, I'll cut it a little.

It's a chance for you fan eds to try a little salesmanship on your own, and watch the results in your circulation. Any of you who don't want to try it can continue to send your fanzine as in the past without any change in procedure. This new idea is just for those who want to do it.

It must be typed, double spaced, with indented paragraphs and an inch and a half margin. Follow the pattern of the reviews as they have been: name of zine, price, name and address of editor, frequency of appearance, then sales-talk review calculated to bring in a thousand subscriptions. It must be under three hundred words, preferably around two hundred.

It must be accompanied by your fanzine, and should be sent to the CLUB HOUSE, Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Illinois.

Along with that, if you have some announcement like the formation of a new fan club, or an old one needing new members, type it double space the same way and I will insert it as it is. We'll see how it works out. It should work out very well. For example, there are local clubs who don't publish a fanzine. The secretary could send a brief blurb to me each month that I could paste into place on the Club House manuscript if it's already double spaced and neatly typed. Be your own publicity agent.

Occasionally someone who has sent in a fanzine for review begins to think I've mislaid it when it doesn't appear in the next issue or two. It takes from two to three months from the time you send it for it to appear in print on the stands. In club meeting notices especially, you should take that fact into consideration. If you want to announce a particular meeting you should get the notice to me three months ahead of time or it will appear on the stands after the meeting is over.

I think all the above is a good idea. It

will turn the Club House over to you fans where it should be, and I will be merely the conductor as the heading says, and confine myself to an editorial at the beginning of the Club House most of the time, plus reviewing those fanzines that don't send in their own blurb.

In *Fantastic Adventures* Bill Hamling mentions that unfortunate picture the art department took of me in which the chair I was sitting in was there, but not me. The reason was quite simple. I'm not a werewolf. I'm just a guy who always does what he's told, and an instant before they snapped the shutter Howard Browne told me to jump out the window and turn to the right. I did it, and discovered there was nothing out there! By the time I got back, the picture had been taken.

June Leeds Moore said in a letter published in the letter column that the Club House is beneath my dignity or intelligence or something. I know she said it as a compliment, indicating she thinks highly of me; but actually, June, fandom is a big American family of guys and gals that anyone would be proud to belong to and associate with actively. In a way, I occupy a unique position as conductor of an unedited department in a science-fiction magazine where the fans can get their projects before the general public the way they want it done, without being judged by an unsympathetic outsider in prejudiced and slanted reviews. There will of course come a day when I no longer conduct the Club House, but when that day comes it will not be because I grew too intelligent to like sharing in the activities of the only slice of modern life that senses the drama of progress and the fascination of the universe. It will be because I'm six feet under, or the editors decide to cut out the Club House, or someone shows up that can carry on the Club House along the policies I've maintained from the start in it, of encouraging fan activities without prejudice or criticism or any attempt to control them.

This year I have a tremendous amount of work cut out for me. My agent in New York, Scott Meredith, cries for material every time he writes me. But my Century pocket books alone will require an average of twenty-five thousand words a month for the rest of the year, and in addition the magazines published in Chicago take all I can possibly produce, so I just don't

have anything to send to the New York markets. I wish I did, but when Howard Browne wades through twenty manuscripts in one evening at home and finds only one story to buy, and needs stories, I have to get to work again, don't I?

Charles Moslander of 2840 Lemp Ave., St. Louis, has written me a couple of nice letters asking me to contribute material to a fanzine he plans on publishing. He's one of many who have asked me to do that. I would like to do that, but I've been too busy even to keep up my activity requirements in FAPA, the past few months. I'm way behind on correspondence too. Just before Christmas when I was in New York I dropped in at Hannes Bok's one day and he showed me a fistful of letters he hasn't answered yet. So he's in the same fix. There just aren't enough hours in the day to take care of everything that should be done and that I want to do. I like to get letters. It's a nice feeling to get a handful of letters from friends and sit down to a quiet cup of coffee while I read them and find out what they're doing or what they think of some story of mine.

Dick Olson, 2504 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis, would like to contact the stf club in that city. Barry Strejcek, 16007 Nela-dale, East Cleveland 12, O., and Bill Berger, want to start a local chapter of the Science-Fantasy Society in Cleveland. If you are interested, get in touch with them. John Horn, 416 Alleghoney, Vallejo, Calif. wants to get in touch with the nearest stf club. George W. Early, Box 39 Symmes Hall, Miami U., Oxford Ohio, wishes to announce the formation of the Miami University Science Fiction Association, with twenty members already! They would like correspondence with any fans who are interested in getting acquainted with them. Ervin Schrader, 4123 1/2 Clayton Ave., St. Louis 10, Mo., wants to start an amateur authors' club. That could become something worth while. Write him if you're interested. And remember to enclose a stamp when you contact someone. Stamps can run into money. Morton D. Paley, 1455 Townsend Ave., N.Y. 52, writes that the Astro Bio-Chems are dissolved and to announce that he is going to publish a fanzine, "Transgalactic". He needs material. Articles, stories, and poetry.

Phil Gordon Waggoner, 23 16 1/2 Charleston Ave., Mattoon Illinois, announces the formation of a new club, The Centaurians. It already has such names as K. Martin Carlson, Wilkie Conner, Ed Cox, Ray Bradbury, Edmond Hamilton, and Evan H. Appelman on its membership list. Dues are fifty cents a year, to be sent to K. Martin Carlson, treasurer, 1028 Third Ave. S., Moorhead, Minnesota. Good luck, Phil. Looks like you have a going concern.

Brian Cullen, 199 Beach Rd., Staten Island 8, N.Y., asks why I gave the name Ra to the High Priest of Verfus in "Two Against Venus", when it is the shortened name of the Terran Coptic Sungod, Am-

non-Ra. Because even in the fantasy element to any stf story it's better to stick to seeming possibilities, and until we have space travel and actually go to Venus and find out, it's a possibility that Venus and Earth have a common history. Science fiction is the vehicle for serious speculation on the unknowns of history as well as science.

THE GORGON. Vol. 2, no. 4; 20; Stanley Mullen, 600 Columbia Rd., Colorado Springs, Colorado. It's a long time since I've gotten a copy of Gorgon. Stan has been busy writing. He's a pro author. His fanzine is a gargantuan job to put out, since it's almost equal to a prozine in quality and quantity of contents. Sixty pages of photo offset printing, with nineteen contributors. The delay since the last issue was due to Sophia having to have an operation, and to moving from one city to another. And for a full-fledged fan like Stan to move is as involved as for a business to move.

Phil Rasch's article on Flying Saucers is well worth reading. It's a comprehensive survey of the more important aspects of the mystery as known to date by the general public.

SCIENCE FANTASY REVIEW: quarterly, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex, England: 25c, \$1.00/yr.; Walter Gillings. A printed pro-fanzine. The winter 49-50 issue features Erik Fennel's "Nobody Wants Utopia", Thomas Sheridan's "The Palmer Hoax", and a very well written article on Jack Williamson, one of the top science-fiction writers of today and the past twenty years. I met Jack at the Convention last fall. He's a very fine fellow.

EUSIFANO: 5c; Eugene Science Fantasy Society, Box 161, Eugene, Ore., phone 5-5774. Rosco lets off a lot of steam about the reprint magazines appearing on the stands now. I'm agin 'em too, but in the long run Darwin will dictate whether they continue or fold. If they make money for the publishers of them, they will continue. Sandy defends the reprint magazines by pointing out that they are much cheaper than to have to get them in hard covers. Vernon McCain has the guest editorial, in which he gives his impressions of fandom as a newcomer, and his delighted surprise to find fans such wonderful people.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c, bi-weekly, James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty Second Ave., Flushing, N.Y. Fandom's top Newszine. The second January issue gives the NFFF election returns which make Rick Sneary pres., Art Rapp Director chairman, Ed Cox, Len Moffatt, Ray Higgs, and James V. Taurasi the other directors.

Tom Gardner begins his review of 1949 in Science Fiction with a review of Famous Fantastic Mysteries magazine.

(Continued On Page 188)

The Reader's FORUM



ALL THE LUCK IN THE WORLD

Dear Mr. Browne:

It is good to see you back as editor. I wondered back in '47 what happened to you; then I began to wonder what happened to your magazines, but now I have the answer. I wish you all the luck in the world in the new year with AMAZING STORIES. Please do me a favor and return to the use of the back cover drawing. The magazine looks so flat without it. (I have been a reader now for some ten years.) Good luck and may you keep the public reading the best.

M.S. Ward
c/o Box 623
Warren, Pa.

We've been doing a little missionary work on our advertising department in an effort to take over the back cover for the purpose you've mentioned, but up to now progress has been slow. We appreciate your good wishes and will do our best to make them come true.

—Ed.

CHEERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

A few cheers are in order—first for the change of policy (I'm afraid I'd have bought few AMAZINGS on the old policy. It was rapidly sliding down my opinion scale.) Next, of course, for the return of Discussions. And then a cheer for most of the stories. Also a "Rah-rah-rah!" for Jones' cover. By the way—that black-and-yellow combination on the heading stands out very effectively. Hope you intend to keep it that way.

Three cheers for "The Galaxy Raiders".
More.

And I always go for the type Peter Worth turned out. So "Typewriter From The Future" ranks next.

"Tomb of the Seven Taajos"—the title almost kept me from reading the story, but Hasse's style and plot finally washed the bitter taste away.

"Spiders of Saturn" was the kind of short I want to see repeats on.

The same goes for "The Last Orbit". Rog's story came down this low only

because there were so many other good ones in the February issue.

That's also true of Russell Storm's "And No Tomorrow". I thought that title was every bit as good as the story.

Hinton's illustration for Paul W Fairman's "No Teeth For The Tiger" made me hesitate to read it. I like my pictures to be useful—to set the mood for the story—and if that was what Hinton's pic was supposed to do—well, it failed. There's something about the way that Hinton does eyes and lips that ruins his stuff for me. Reminiscent of Paul, altho Hinton's figures are much better than Paul's. But when I finally got into the story, I realized that it was, like the rest of them, good.

AMAZING STORIES is not on the top of my list, yet. However, if the changes keep being improvements, it won't take it long to get out of the lower class. The name, AMAZING STORIES, long stood for The Best In The Field. Maybe it will return to that. It's already on it's way!

Shelby Vick
Box 493
Lynn Haven, Florida

AND JEERS

Sirs:

I have been reading AMAZING STORIES for some time and never thought it necessary to write in to criticize an issue. That is not until I received the thing the cover called the January issue. The only story that had anything of the old AMAZING in it was "Omega". "Gehenna, Incorporated" was the only one left worth mentioning. This was because of a good plot not a good author. As a Shaver fan I looked forward to "We Dance For the Dom". After reading the first few paragraphs I threw up my hands, the magazine, and half my lunch. I would like to know whether Shaver was sick, doped, drunk, or just underpaid. The only good thing about the mag was the art work. Has the new ed anything to do with it or was it just bad luck? I'm hoping for a great February issue. We want some Shaver and Phillips' stories. And how about printing a Burroughs novel sometime or the other?

This letter will probably never be published but after reading that issue I just had to write in.

Anthony Lubowe
760 Grand Concourse
New York 51, N.Y.

By this time, we hope, you've read the February and March issues of AMAZING STORIES, and we'll be watching the mail to learn how your lunch agreed with you.... And we assure you that our authors are never underpaid. —Ed.

HAWLEY HOLDS THE LINE

Dear Sirs:

The question of time travel is an interesting one, and I would like to offer a few comments on Jack Jarrette's letter which was printed in the March issue of the AMAZING STORIES "Reader's Forum".

In the first place, I think there was some misunderstanding about what Mr. Jarrette meant by a "dot". What he speaks of as a dot is known mathematically as a point, and a point has no dimensions. It is only symbolized and not pictured by the period at the end of this sentence. It is obvious to everyone that the smallest dot (period) imaginable would still have length, breadth, and thickness and would therefore still be a three dimensional object. In fact, it is an impossibility to construct any object that has less than three dimensions.

In disagreement with Mr. Jarrette, it is conceivable that lining up an infinite number of points could produce a line. This is because the dimension of the point, zero, multiplied by infinity gives a result which is mathematically indeterminate. This means that the result *could* be some finite number, or length.

Time travel is possible. In fact, it has been accomplished! Mesons formed in the farthest reaches of the atmosphere by Cosmic Ray bombardment have velocities approaching that of the speed of light. These particles have a very short life span, something like 10-6 seconds, and they disintegrate into some form of energy at the end of this time. If we use this (known) value for the life of these mesons and their velocities, we can calculate that they never have time to reach the earth! And yet they are found here. The answer, of course, lies in the theory of relativity. The velocity of the mesons is so high that, according to Einstein's equation, t equals c^2 (c square) — v^2 , (v square) the time they exist is increased according to their velocity. In other words, they have traveled through time into the future! In theory, this same sort of thing could be accomplished by a man in a super-rocket ship. He could leave the earth and circle it at a speed a trifle less than that of light. Then, for him, a few seconds could correspond to as many thousand years on earth. He could, then, land after a few seconds and be thousands of years in the

future! The equation, however, says nothing about travel into the past. Any suggestions?

As a passing comment, there is an interesting discussion of time as a fourth dimension in Gamow's book *One, Two, Three... Infinity*.

Alfred E. Hawley
1509 South Pearl Avenue
Compton 1, California

If Mr. Jarrette can refute the above argument he has our admiration. In fact, if he can fully understand it, he has our undisguised envy! —Ed.

MYSTERY OF THE SHEATHED BLADE

Sirs:

Say, what ever happened to Alex Blade? After reading his terrific articles month in and month out I am somewhat disappointed in not hearing from, or reading him since "The Octopus of Space" way back in the October issue of F.A.

How about a real good feature by Alex in the next issue of FA? No matter how good the issue, it still isn't complete without a novel or novelette by Blade. He is, in my opinion, the best of the science fantasy writers not under-rating such pen pushers as Rog Phillips, Rob Williams, Craig Browning, McGivern, and all the others. Your magazine is easily the best in the business. Keep up the good work.

I want an answer on why and where Alex Blade has been keeping himself the past issues.

Simeon Beer
8678 Bay Parkway
Brooklyn, New York

We're as much in the dark as you on Alex Blade's strange disappearance. Writers are given to going off somewhere without explanation, usually to figure out new story plots. We're confident he'll show up one of these days—show up in the way we want him to: with the ms. of a good story under his arm. —Ed.

YOUTH SAID IT!

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have just finished reading your "Reader's Forum", and having seen my brother's letter published I figure mine will be too. First, I want to disagree with June Leeds Moore. This magazine should not be made into any adults' book. The market may be flooded with kid stories but they're not science fiction. Keep AMAZING STORIES so the young readers can understand it too. Let's have more stories like the "Star Kings". Where did all the old space fleet battle stories go? Let's forget a little science fiction and give us more action: On the whole though,

(Continued On Page 190)

THE ANCIENT GEOMETRICAL MONUMENT

By ROCKY STONE

(NOTE: This is the eighth of the TAG-M Series of Articles that furthers the disclosure of the fundamental principle of man,—which has been sought for by mankind for centuries,—and which is the exact scientific basis which allows government (political science), jurisprudence (science of law), psychiatry (science of treating mental disorders), and psychology (science of human nature) to become genuine sciences.)

THE MENTAL giants of long ago, the M-giants, apparently understood the human equation to such a high degree that the great scientific facts epitomized and keyed in their ancient time-capsule, the Great Pyramid, *could not be decoded and employed* by human society until mental evolution had progressed to a point on the FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE scale where then the intelligent members of human society could cognize and face world conditions,—as these are today,—and act with correct knowledge.

The disclosure of the fundamental principle of man in AMAZING STORIES will mark the beginning of one of the greatest advances of not only the human race, but of all fields of science, as will be recognized by future generations.

It will be wise to keep the meaning of the words of Lucretius in mind, "Fly no opinion, because 'tis new, but strictly search, and after careful view, reject it, if 'tis false—embrace it, if 'tis true."

William Penn also warned, "Neither despise, nor oppose, what thou dost not understand," while Davy Crockett, familiar with how a scalp could be lost, likewise cautioned, "Be sure you are right—then go ahead."

The author does not have too many illusions, if any, concerning the state

of human society today—especially in the U.S.A. He has assumed all kinds of characters and jobs (even Shakespeare realized that we're all actors) from the East to the West coasts, as well as from the South to the North borders of the U.S.A.—and he can speak with authority from observation and experience about the present temper of the American people, not only concerning those in high positions of authority and responsibility, but also regarding those from there down to and including the "jungles".

The author knows why it is necessary to face reality—especially since he was forced, believe it or not, to wander from one city or village to another, divested of all status and citizenship rights, friends and family, altho always following the main objective. Only in actual life experience can you gain correct knowledge of human beings—as they really are when they believe themselves to be unobserved by anyone who would really matter—thru actual observation, facts, and experience. A rule, a paraphrase on Herschel's, is worthwhile to remember, "Never accept anything from the suppositions and theories of others,—or doubly so from your own suppositions and theories,—but only accept those things which thru logical

(Continued On Page 180)

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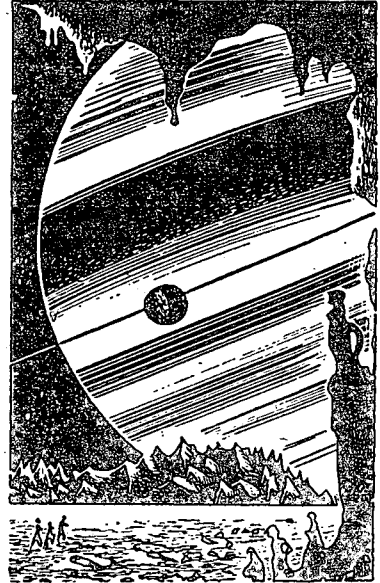
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reasoning, careful observation, and the experience of others you have found to be genuine facts which can be verified beyond any question or shadow of a doubt."

In the very late past years, one of the greatest games in the life experience of man was played, *and won*. None of you even knew what was happening, and most of you perhaps could not even now realize that we went over the goal line. Six points (the famous six truncated pyramids of TAG-M, the hyper-cube) are already in. The seventh point is sure; it has already been taken care of—and this final point will always reverberate down thru the corridors of time. An American; very "roughed up" and practically "out on his feet", caught the long forward pass from an M-giant, who was far, far behind the "Continental 1776 Line," and he staggered over for a *touchdown*. Even now you cannot see that seventh point looming up exactly between the goal posts,—it 'smacks' of the "hidden-ball-play",—since the CUBE OF INFINITY, retranslated, becomes the INVISIBLE SPHERE OF INFINITY, symbol of the "Sacred Sphere", about which even Haggard referred to in "She". (See Article 3 for the INVISIBLE SPHERE OF INFINITY.)

But do let us go from the ridiculous to the sublime, or better still, from 'that which is figurative' to *reality, itself*.

Any person's hypotheses, theories, or suppositions regarding the reality of nature in everyday life actually come to naught in actual life experience, unless such hypotheses, theories or suppositions are in perfect coordination and correlation with *that which is*. And it has already been pointed out in Article 7, "The narrow-mindedness and stubbornness of some people to accept new verified facts, is

simply due to the patterns in their physical brains and methods of thinking, which hold them back from understanding *that which is*." So face *that which is*—since facing and understanding reality gives the only courage and happiness which man can conquer on this earth, your planet.

Nietzsche (1844-1900), the German philosopher, was apparently correct in his "above good and evil" for man, but it is no wonder that he was overcome and went down from not being able to gain the correct knowledge about the real basic facts concerning the genuine science of man.

In the nature of life, which also means man's actual life experience, there is nothing either good or bad in reality, simply because everything real in life, *just is*. Everything in life can be verified and proved,—or discarded as being based only upon the suppositions and superstitions of man. *That which is*, both subjectively and objectively (the real understanding and mental picture of any person which are thoroughly coordinated and correlated with a particular event), is *reality, itself*. Even now and in the coming harrowing years, everyone of you must face reality, simply because reality is administered by the greatly-more-than-steel enforced laws or methods of action of the power of nature, itself, which no man can legislate against nor conquer—but must submit to and obey in every way. Just try to suppose about any of our congressmen attempting to pass a law that if you stepped off a high building, you couldn't fall!

APPARENTLY WE ARE ALL EQUAL UNDER THE ACTUAL AND IMPERSONALLY ENFORCED LAWS OR METHODS OF ACTION OF NATURE, WHILE IGNORANCE OF THESE ALWAYS

(Continued On Page 182)

What is Indecency in a Book?

OR WHO IS
OBSCENE?

As a great defender of books in our courts asks more pungently in the title of a recent book of his.

America suffers of a vast variety of censorships—state, federal, local—

But the most insidious of all censors we have found is the average American bookdealer himself. When we first brought to him James Joyce's *ULYSSES* he held up his hands in pious horror. A few years later, when the book was D. H. Lawrence's *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*, he held up his nose as well as his hands. He sells both of them now that they have become modern classics.

The same reception was accorded our reprint of Charles-Louis Philippe's *BUBU OF MONTPARNAASSE*. Even Nobel Prize Winner T. S. Eliot's *Introduction* didn't help. For the bookdealer this great work remains nothing more than a chronicle of the lives of men and women who make up the sidewalk traffic of Paris.

When, more recently, we came to the bookdealer with Michael Sadleir's *FORLORN SUNSET* the delicacy had become class-delicacy. This great author's previous work, *Fanny By Gaslight*—which concerned itself with the predominately vicious amusements of the rich—was allowed to be pyramided into best-sellerdom. Because *FORLORN SUNSET* shows with great care the effect of this overwhelming sensualism on the lives of the poor the censorial hands and noses went up again.

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ENFORCED LAWS EXCUSES NO ONE. THERE ARE NO PRIVILEGED PERSONS, LIKE UNDER THE LAWS OF MAN, WHILE ALTHO EACH OF US HAS DIFFERENT STATUS AND TALENTS FROM ANCESTORS AND OTHER IMPORTANT CAUSES AND REASONS, EVERYONE OF US DOES HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF FREE WILL OR CHOICE IN ATTAINING OR REFUSING FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE.

It has already been pointed out in the TAG-M Articles that persons usually tend to denounce their own opinions of that which they do not understand, and it is possible that there will be those who might have the grandiose thought of being able to make prejudgment from their own bias, prejudice, and limited experience without having a complete understanding of the real facts concerning the fundamental principle of man which is to be disclosed.

So let no bias, prejudice, nor intolerance cloud your reasoning regarding the genuine facts to be presented, any more than you would desire to oppose the landing of a highly-trained combat force of U.S. Marines at a "beach-head", who had and were prepared to use with devastating effect—both psychologically and physically—superior weapons that are far beyond your ken. And you might be desirous of being behind such a combat force, instead of being hostile.

One of the worst plagues of human society, altho it has not been generally recognized as such, is *emotional instability*, which has contributed to the cause of wars and most of the other errors in human history. Almost every family has experienced the effects of this dire malady or disorder, to a more or less degree.

The M-giants apparently knew that the understanding and the practice of

what is keyed in their ancient time-capsule, the Great Pyramid, can and will prevent and cure this age-old human malady or disorder, while future generations will actually wonder why this human malady or disorder had not been both recognized and cured or prevented long before the time of our generation. If we could only see ourselves today from a time in the future, as future generations will see us!

Emotional instability is caused by abnormal or unnatural fear, which is nothing else but the result of wrong thinking. And you have already been informed that the objective of even today's schools, colleges, and universities is to teach the pupil or student *how to think and how to concentrate correctly!*

Informed future generations will look with suspicion on the mentality of the people of our generation, and they will most likely calculate how old we must have been mentally when abnormal and unnatural fear had not yet been eliminated by correct knowledge and its employment in regard to man. Even the M-giants must have chuckled long ago when they realized in what predicament our generation would find itself today!

Almost every adult, as a child in our generation, has begun life on this earth, your planet, with the grandiose delusion that there must be someone in every field of human endeavor who actually knew and understood "what it was all about". As you now perhaps know, even from the statement of Charles Kettering in Article 7 about "keeping an 'iron curtain' down upon how much we do not know", nothing could be farther from the actual facts concerning human society as it is organized today.

And almost all of you today understand that in order not to remain "behind the eight-ball", everyone of you

must desire to "get on the ball".

The author realizes that there are many more persons today, in the lowest-rated positions in human society who have greater intelligence, character, and know-how than has been recognized by most of those who are supposed to be in positions of authority and responsibility. You and the author know that different opinions and points-of-view often assist the attainment of a correct solution to any problem, but we must all realize that in the presentation of true and already verified scientific facts which are not just hypotheses, theories, or suppositions, a cold and incisive method is necessary which may appear dogmatic at times, and at other times roundabout.

The HOW in science is most important and with the WHAT, the WHY, the WHEN, the WHERE, and

the WHO compose the SIX ABLE SERVING MEN of Kipling who are always around the campfire, before *the attack at dawn*;

There may be enough time before *the attack at dawn* to unlimber a few facts. It has appeared more than just astounding to the author for many years that real concerted effort and productive tactics have apparently never been fully undertaken by human society to find out everything concerning man—especially when almost every person does not know *from where he or she comes, why he or she is here, and the destination!*

Here is a "SPECIAL DELIVERY" received Friday, January 13, 1950, in the Chicago Daily News;

"Dr. Carl Binger

Alger Hiss Case

New York, N.Y.

(Continued On Page 184)

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Dear Doc:

You almost persuade us that an expert is one who says "psychopathic personality" instead of "screwball".

Dad Dearborn."

Many of you who have read Article 7, "Der Tag (The Day)", may understand.

Perhaps no Robin Hood, Alexander, or Hannibal could ever have engineered the actual ambushment of ignorance among the human race. Yet it can be done—and with overwhelming effect to the arch enemy of Man, IGNORANCE.

The author, Rocky Stone, loves the U.S.A.,—the country in which he was born,—and especially the coming actual practice of the Bill of Rights, upon which this country has progressed and evolved up to the present time. AND THE U.S.A. HAS BEEN FACING ITS CRISIS TODAY.

There may be too many persons today, who call themselves Americans, and who are dancing to the tune of "The Yankee Dollar" without also fully realizing and really understanding "The Star-Spangled Banner"—and especially "THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC".

It might or might not be interesting for you to know that *to love* means *to understand with wisdom* or *to really know*. Thus, "Love thy neighbor, as thyself," requires "Know thy neighbor, as thyself." Remember the warning of Socrates, "Know thyself!" And even Mohammed gave, "He who knows himself, knows God."

But always remember the admonition of Alexander Pope, who cautioned, "Presume not God to scan, the proper study of man, is man." So let us get back to the coming disclosure of the fundamental principle of man that allows government, law, psy-

chiatry, and psychology to become genuine sciences.

Alfred North Whitehead uncovered an important fact in *Science and the Modern World*, which is, "Familiar things happen and mankind does not bother about them. It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious." Whitehead also states, "When William James was finishing his treatise on *Principles of Psychology*, he wrote to his brother Henry, 'I have to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts,' " and then Whitehead goes on, "This new tinge to modern minds is a vehement and passionate interest in the relation of general principles to irreducible and stubborn facts."

The fundamental principle of man is based upon irreducible and stubborn facts which are self-evident to persons of average intelligence and character, but it requires real study, so that it can be fully understood and used.

Du Nouy has realized that mental evolution is a fact. In "Human Destiny" he states, "That a trial on the biological plane transforms itself into a test on the psychological plane, and that in the latter case there is no longer just a question of surviving, since a superior level is attained, but it is only a question of progressing psychologically and morally,—and as in the past (Darwin) progress can only take place by struggle, competition, and selection."

THE AUTHOR gave his word 18 years ago that he would disclose the important facts for man that are keyed in the ancient time-capsule, the Great Pyramid. The author does not claim to be a writer—in fact, he is more interested in unearthing correct knowledge about the real basic facts

of nature, especially those in relation to man. It may seem somewhat strange that the author has actually had wide experience in the field of banking, the "nerve-center" of the economic system, and he is as familiar with the ratios on assets and liabilities, as those on the nominal accounts of expense and income. Because of all his past experience, he is now prepared for anything—even the "worst"—since he belongs to a very small contingent in the forces of mental evolution in human society,—a "Space-Warp" commander in the shocktroops.

Not living to his word would spell dereliction of duty not only to the "Great Ships of the Continental Line,"—THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE and THE U.S. CONSTITUTION—but also to the human race, many of whom could not under-

stand.

Let's digress,—and we find that Piazzi Smyth, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, was the first to draw attention to the fact that the Great Pyramid is almost exactly oriented (within 5 seconds),—its four sides are directed to the four cardinal points of the compass: North, South, East, and West,—and he also pointed out that when the vertical plane of the Great Pyramid's passages is produced northwards, it passes along the central axis of the Delta region on the Mediterranean; while the northeast and northwest diagonals of this great monument, similarly produced, enclose the Delta of the Nile "in a symmetrical and well-balanced manner."

Figure CC in Article 6 showed the ninety (90) degree arc of a circle on the Delta of the Nile which has definite
(Continued On Page 186)

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relation to the 90 degree *angle in infinity* of each of the six truncated pyramids of TAG-M, the hyper-cube. Mr. Mitchell, chief hydrographer of the United States Coast Survey, was the American who in 1868 was struck with the regularity of the general convex curvature at the northern coast of the Delta of the Nile, as has been pointed out by Morton Edgar.

Part of the Southern end of the Grand Gallery which leads up to the so-called "King's Chamber," the Upper Light Chamber, was shown in Figure P in Article 4. The courses of stone on the walls of the Grand Gallery are symbolic of the six truncated pyramids of the hyper-cube, TAG-M, with its CUBE OF INFINITY. Only by a full understanding of what these are symbols of can the human race progress, until able to reverse itself, by FREEDOM FROM IGNORANCE, and then use the correct knowledge of the reality of nature, in *that which is*.

To John Taylor of Scotland goes the credit for discovering that the Egyptians were able apparently to square a circle in theory and actual practice. "The scientific feature which was first discovered," according to Morton Edgar, "was that the vertical height of the Great Pyramid was to twice the breadth of its square base, as the diameter of a circle is to its circumference, that is, 5813 pyramid inches is to 2×9131 pyramid inches as 1 is to 3.14159 (Pi)."

Another way whereby the so-called "King's Chamber," the Upper Light Chamber, shows its connection with the solar year and the sun (pyramid symbol of the life energy of the universe,) was explained by Piazzi Smyth, "Take the length of the King's Chamber, 412.132 pyramid inches, to express the diameter of a circle. Compute, by the best methods

of modern science, the area of that circle; throw that area into a square shape, and find the length of the side of such a square. The answer will be 365.242, which at the rate of one pyramid inch for one day shows the number of days it takes for your earth to go around the sun."

Seiss wrote, "Helfricus (1565) and Baumgarten (1594) considered the Great Pyramid a tomb, but held that no one was ever buried in it. Pietro Della Vallé (1616), Thevenot (1655), and Maillet (1692) give it as a common belief that no one ever was therein tombed. Vausleb (1664) could find no clue by which to determine why this pyramid was built. Shaw (1721) denies that it ever was a tomb, or ever was intended to be one. Jomard (1801), having studied all the features of this edifice, and compared them day by day with all the facts and forms of old Egyptian pyramids, wrote concerning it, 'Everything is mysterious, I repeat it, in the construction and distribution of this monument, the passages oblique, horizontal, sharply bent, of different dimensions!'"

What has been written about this mammoth monument would fill a good-sized library, and it does seem somewhat ironical that the solution of the mystery of this ancient time-capsule should have come about, not from the original study of the Great Pyramid, which was not investigated until long afterwards, but from the flashing geometrical graph arrived at, the winter of 1932-33, from the discoveries of a number of actual and genuine facts which are bound to cause a new attitude to be formed by human society regarding the genuine science of man and all of the fields of science.

So far, you have received the beginning of an outstanding disclosure in the fields of archaeology and the

genuine science of man, but let us get down to business on the basic factors and facts which compose the fundamental principle of man.

Many persons have never fully realized apparently that they have only their own mental pictures of objects, things, and persons, which may be quite different from the actual objects, things, and persons, as these really are.

Too, many persons have apparently never been warned about the ill effects that such mental pictures can have on their body and mind, when the wrong feeling is associated with those mental pictures.

The humor attached to the mental picture of an angry person calling his or her own mental picture of another person a derogatory name has never been fully plumbed. While the facts about mental pictures in the human mind and the feelings associated with them, are very instructive.

Freud, the pioneer in psychiatry, theorized that the endocrine glands, when their functions were understood, might show their contribution to the cause of mental illnesses and disorders—and he apparently theorized correctly to a great extent.

But you are more interested in gaining the courage and happiness which the understanding and the practice of the fundamental principle of man can open for you.

Leland Hinsie gave an introduction to the translation of Alfred Adler's "Understanding Human Nature", in which he stated, "Self understanding is the first law of happiness," while Adler apparently had respect for the belief of Herodotus, the Greek historian, "The destiny of man lies in his soul."

THE END



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THE CLUB HOUSE

BY ROG PHILLIPS

(Continued From Page 175)

NEBULA: 10c, \$1.00/yr.; Warren Baldwin, 407 Philip Ave., Norfolk, Nebr. "Sheriff Daw and the Time Bandit" by Jim Craig is an unusual story, ending with the provocative "to be continued maybe". "The Secret of the City", by William James, is good enough to be pro. It concerns a mysterious city on Mars.

But what does it say in the editorial? This second issue is to be the last! Not enough subscribers. That's tough luck, Warren. Maybe if enough fellows sent you a dime for another ish you'd reconsider, huh? I know you WANT to keep on. How about it, fen?

DAWN: a letterzine; bimonthly; 5/50c; Russell Watkins, 203 Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Ky. Besides being a letterzine it contains stories and articles. I think about the best story in the whole batch this month is "Postmark" by Evan H. Appelman. He ought to write pro, in my opinion.

Joe Gibson of Jersey City leads off the letter department with a long letter which is different from most long letters in that it holds up interest and says plenty. Other letters are by O.F. Thornburgh, Evan Appelman, and that's all. Sixteen reg-length pages.

FAN-FARE: bimonthly, 6/50c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, N.Y., who sends a nice letter with his fanzine. Since the letter says more about the fanzine, and does it much better than I could, I'm enclosing it in the column. It bears out what I was saying earlier about maybe it would be a good thing for you fan eds to boost your own wares. Here it is:

"Dear Rog:

Enclosed herein you will find the first issue of my first attempt at editing an interesting fan magazine; or should I say that this letter is enclosed within the 'zine? That it's meant for review in THE CLUB HOUSE is too obvious to mention, or would be if I hadn't already done so.

I have had more trouble getting out this first issue than I'd anticipated; for the first of the month I had everything except typewriter ribbons for the hecto, so had to venture forth and purchase carbon papers; when the ribbons finally arrived, the gelatin had, naturally (what else?), burst, broken, shattered, or whatever verb is most suitable to describe the rending of the film. Another week went by during which I tried three times to remelt the darned stuff. It didn't emerge too good from the heat treatment, but I decided to sacrifice perfection for speed, and therefore a couple of the pages aren't as good as they could be.

Nevertheless, it's finally out, and I hope

you like it well enough to give it a fairly good review. You'll note that it's primarily fan fiction; I'm one of the few fans unaffected by what seems to be a "fact fad" among other fan editors. I just can't see anyone becoming interested in twenty pages, more or less, of fact. And I also can't see what makes people (well, I guess fen are people) think that fan fact is any better, compared to the professional article, than fan fiction is compared to professional fiction.

I also thought you might mention the INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION CORRESPONDENCE CLUB: the fan club without dues; only cost is the subscription to the bi-monthly club organ, the EXPLORER—50c per year. Benefits, among others, are getting material printed therein, meeting other interesting persons in this democratic organization, and the fact that a 20% discount on first-class s-f books such as WHAT MAD UNIVERSE and BEST SF STORIES: 49 is available to members. Write me, I guess, since the present President may no longer be in office by the time you are ready to broadcast this.

Sincerely,

W. PAUL GANLEY"

I just want to add that the only article in the issue was really something. It proves that time travel is possible! And the short stories! I predict a successful future for this fanzine. Its material is tops.

SPACEWARP: Feb.; 15c, 9/\$1.00; Art Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich. In his editorial Art announces that SAPS is now full and has a waiting list—as I warned you it would be. I was supposed to review the SAPS mailing this time, but the deadline for the Club House got pushed up ten days on me without warning, so it'll have to wait. They don't need a boost anyway.

Art has changed Warp from a general fanzine to an article fanzine. Maybe it will be a good change. The first article is, "Is Science Catching Up with Science-Fiction?" by Ed Cox.

"The Hydrogen Bomb", by Warren Baldwin, is an extremely interesting article. But I think Warren has the wrong idea about it. Hydrogen itself is not a fissionable atom. You can't have a chain reaction in hydrogen. Let's see if I can explain the danger of the hydrogen bomb clearly in a few words.

The atom bomb works on the principle that there is a critical mass for the material. That is, less than the critical amount won't explode under any circumstances. Any amount above the critical mass will. That makes the size of the bomb limited. You can have bombs only so big. Which is big enough, so far as the destruction is concerned.

The hydrogen bomb, on the other hand, consists of an atom bomb and some quite stable stuff that is safe in any quantity until the atom bomb detonator unit ex-

plodes, creating sun heat and the titanic energy necessary to start it. Since, pound for pound, it is as powerful as an atom bomb, and you can make one with even a thousand tons of mass to it, it would be quite easy to make one big enough to destroy the earth. But of course that won't be done. Only two will be built. One big enough to destroy America, and one big enough to destroy Eurasia. Eventually they will both be sold to the Alaska Junk Company to be dismantled and sold as scrap atom bomb material to interested fans. So eventually fandom will be able to put both bombs together again and blow up all non fen. It will be done as an advertising feature at the 1999 stf convention. One nice thing about the hydrogen bomb, you'll never know it blew up the Earth when it does. They'll keep it out of the newspapers.

STF TRADER: Jan. Feb.; 5c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. S.; Moorhead Minn.. A strictly advertising medium with nothing else. All ads are devoted to selling and trading stf literature. Magazines and books. Typical ad: "Selling Out My Collection! You can put in an ad for fifty cents a full page, and reach plenty of fans, all of them interested in buying and trading.

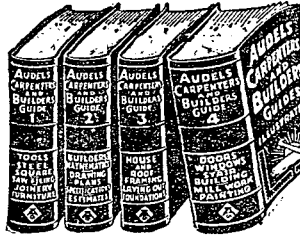
JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: Jan.; Chicago Rocket Society. The price is up to 25c, \$2.25/yr., but it's worth it. Wayne Proell, 10630 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago 43, Ill.. The main article this issue is, "Aluminum Borohydride Assa Fuel For Space Ships", by Wayne Proell and Norman Bowman. That takes up nine pages of data and facts. "Rocket Abstracts" is four pages of numbered items of interest to rocketry fans.

Meetings of the Chicago Rocket Society are held each month in Roosevelt College. If you live near enough to attend, write to Wayne and ask about the meetings.

PRO-CARD: 4/10c, Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y.. An interesting experiment in publishing a fanzine on penny postcards. A lot can be done with this. Give him a subscription and see what he can put out. The first one is just an announcement that it will be published.

WASHINGTON NEWS LETTER: Chick Derry, 6604 Allegheny Ave., Takoma Park, Md.. A one page mimeographed newsletter. Highlight is the quote: "My wife asks the following: 'I married a FAN: together we are FEN: does that make FUN of our children?'" I could think of a good answer: if you have five children that makes them a FIN. If you have no more that makes a FINIS. Unless you are FON of your husband. Anybody know any more vowels? No price listed on WNL, but send a stamp if you send for it.

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FLORIDA FANTASY FAN: 20c; W.H. Entrekin, Jr., 775 N.W. 13th Ave., Miami 35, Fla.. Official organ of the Florida Science Fiction Society and free to members. Four pages, a professional printing job, which is very costly; but more pages are promised as material is available, so you can look for it to increase in size rapidly. It says, "If we have to run to forty or fifty pages we'll do it. Let's hope they will, because the first issue shows they can put out an interesting zine. And if you live near Miami, get in to a meeting."

NEWS AND VIEWS: 5c, Alan M. Grant, 129 Edgemore St., Fayetteville, N.Y. A regalelength two page hekto sheet. It covers a lot of territory in that space though. And Alan is having a lot of fun publishing it. He's smart, too, in not building it up so big it will take all his spare time after school to put it out. You know, in reading over this zine I discover how much can really be said in a half dozen well placed words.

THE DETROIT STFAN: Feb, 1950; Edith Furcsik, sec., 5037 Maplewood Ave., Detroit 4, Mich. News Bulletin of the Detroit Science-Fantasy League, newly formed. They hold meetings at the homes of the various members, and this promises to be an active club worth belonging to, you Detroiters. Good luck to you.

One last item before closing the books for this month. John E. Blyler, R.D. No 1, Ashville, Penn., must be unlucky. So far, that is. He published a fanzine. He sent me a copy to a wrong address. He sent me another copy, and I can't find it. Just the letter. In his letter he says it's a dirty old-beat-up kind of an issue, absolutely no good and not worth a cent of anybody's money, because he hasn't got the money to put out a decent fanzine. But he wants to. So please, you guys and gals, send him some money so he can get the materials to put one out. Change his luck. O.K.?

ROG PHILLIPS

THE READER'S FORUM

(Continued From Page 177)

seconds and be thousands of years in the your magazine is tops. The only improvement I can suggest is more novels.

Peter Sherrill
2655 Dellwood
Jacksonville, Florida

We're trying hard to put the kind of story into *Amazing Stories* that any reader, regardless of his age, can not only understand but thoroughly enjoy. Surely such stories can contain both science and action. But we refuse to believe that our younger readers can't understand and enjoy anything higher than the level of comic books! —Ed.

DOWN THAT HOLLYWOOD TRAIL

Dear Sir:

Having at hand the Feb. issue of Amazing stf and being fairly content with same, I thought you might like to hear from another old reader of stf. Not that I have much to say or anything particularly important to bring to your attention, unless:

Has it occurred to you that science fiction may be hitting the trail of the Hollywood Toboggan? The stories have seemed to reach an impasse for new material. Nearly everything we read now is a rehash of old yarns. And more and more often a story such as Peter Worth's "Typewriter From The Future" appears.

When Hollywood was at its peak, or perhaps just sliding over the edge, they began producing stories about themselves—show business, its glories, its successes and all that. It was the typical American Life of start at the bottom and work to the top in a flurry of singing, dancing and of course love-angle. They produced yarns about individual actors who had become famous, about the Great White Way, about ...well you know what I'm hinting at. Singing its own praises, so to speak. Then came the slump.

Now I find science fiction singing its praises with talk such as "as it always has, science fiction will bring you the future before it happens." And all too frequently stories such as the one mentioned.

I have read and enjoyed stf for over twenty years. Either I am getting old and crotchety, or it's not the fiction it used to be. On the other hand, it could be that science has caught up with fiction, and the mags will retrogress to the role of reporter. Space forbid!

Let's take a jump ahead, and instead of so many stories laid in the present with a futuristic lace trimming, somebody write something new and completely at odds with what is generally conceived to be the Status Quo.

Waldo T. Boyd
6218 Edwards Avenue
West Des Moines,
Iowa

We think other science-fiction fans will have something to say about your views in this letter. If they do, we'll print their replies! —Ed.

Have you any comments on
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WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

By
SALEM LANE

THE SAD cry of the Ancient Mariner is heard louder and louder all over the country. New York's famous water shortage is simply a symptom of a trouble that is common to the entire United States. It is a symptom of a disease which scientists are preparing to cure right now, for the future demands it.

Water is such a cheap common commodity that we ordinarily don't think twice about it. But personal and industrial use all over the country is so great that the wells and springs and rivers which supply it, can no longer offer the enormous quantities they used to. Only those who live near the Great Lakes or other fresh bodies of water are safe from ultimate danger of being without water. Each time technicians in cities and towns all over the country make surveys of the height of the underground water-levels, they find that they've receded continually and are receding at an ever-increasing rate. We can't cut down on water consumption; in fact, we need more. What are we going to do about it?

There are a number of solutions. The U.S. Government is conducting an all-out effort to devise methods of making fresh water from sea water, first of all. Ordinary distillation, that is, boiling the water and condensing the steam is prohibitively expensive and out of the question. Certain highly efficient "pressure" stills do work efficiently enough for the limited quantities of water required aboard ships, certain desert island stations and for emergencies. But the answer to obtaining fresh water from sea water lies in chemical "ionization" methods which are gradually being worked out. These systems use chemicals which remove the salt and minerals from sea-water very cheaply. If this method is finally worked out, fine. Then the inexhaustible sea will provide water for much of the coasts.

But the inland United States will have to seek its water elsewhere. It now appears that eventually there will have to be a great network of water conduits similar to the oil and gas pipelines which lace the country, built to convey water from the Great Lakes to these inland communities. Perhaps huge aqueduct systems like those of ancient Rome will supply these dire needs.

Regardless of the method, the problem must be solved. Water is the source of life. Barren arid areas do not support a civilization comparable with ours. Fortunately, technology has potential answers which will be translated into action when the time comes.

The year two thousand may see water handed just like the public utilities handle gas and electricity...

NEWTON AND THE SLUG

By
JUNE LURIE

LAYMEN are familiar with such scientific terms as "kilowatt", "horsepower" "pound" and so on. But it is generally not so well known that scientists like to give names to their technical units, names usually which commemorate the memory of some great scientist. Thus you'll find "watt" after James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, "Joule" after the discoverer of the relationship between heat and mechanical energy and similar terms and names.

Sir Isaac Newton has been honored in this way for a long time. In the metric kilogram, second, and meter system, the name "newton" has been given to the unit of force. "I shoved him with a force of twenty newtons," you might say.

In the English system, the pound is a unit of force as everyone knows. But if the pound is used as a unit of force, you've got to have a unit of mass. Well the imaginative engineers devised one. The unit of mass is a weight of thirty-two pounds and it's called the "slug". People are still trying to figure out where that one came from! There aren't any scientists named "Slug"—the latest theory is that the man who named the unit was a boxing fan...

FLEXIBLE IRON

By
JOHN WESTON

WHEN A draftsman or a designer puts the cryptic note "C.I." on a drawing it is understood that he's referring to cast iron, and that the part he's making will be cheap, capable of standing a lot of abuse, rigid and inflexible. But that may not be completely true any longer.

Cast iron has a lot of advantages; the two best known are its cheapness and its fluidity which means that it can be poured into a mold in almost any shape, no matter how complicated. The major drawback to its use in many applications has been its brittleness. It can't resist shock nor can it flex or bend. In some respects it's like glass.

But recently metallurgists have succeeded in making a form of cast iron by treating it with magnesium metal, which retains all its advantages but in addition is as flexible as an old shoe!

It's hard to imagine taking a bar of cast iron and twisting it just as you would a piece of steel. But now it can be done. Consequently many automobile and machine parts that were formerly made of cast steel or wrought iron or special alloys, will now be made from the cheapest and most common of metals.

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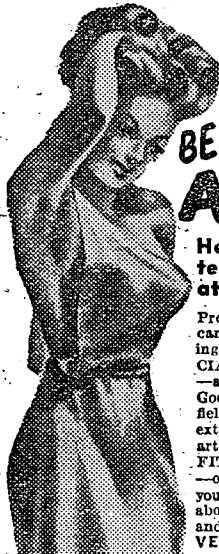
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EASY ATOMICS

BY L. A. BURT

FROM A small village in England comes an announcement which may or may not be extremely significant. A certain amateur scientist, a British Army major, has built a miniature atomic pile! He calls his gadget "the aspatron" after the name of the company for which he works.

The aspatron is simply a double boiler of copper kettles. The space between is filled with neutron-absorbing water and layers of copper sheet and paraffin occupy the interior. Also in the interior is placed uranium oxide. Ordinarily but slightly radioactive the uranium oxide, with its radiations confined, becomes a powerful neutron releasing agency and serves to make radioactive many other substances. In effect, the aspatron is a miniature atomic pile, requiring none of the vast shielding associated with such agents of the devil.

If true, this machine could be very useful, making possible the creation of certain radioactives, almost upon demand. Furthermore, what promise it might hold for research. Its cheapness, a matter of a few thousand dollars, would make it available everywhere. Until we hear more about it we can only speculate. It is a case of not knowing, of wondering whether or not such a device is a good thing. It's possible that soon we may be able to manufacture atomic bombs in the cellar... God forbid!

VICTIMS OF THE VORTEX

(Concluded From Page 39)

know the reason. You really love Ahla-ahloa. If your theory is right that it is love that held the eddy warp tied to your world lines, all you've gone through may have merely increased that love to supernatural proportions and made the eddy return to the main space-time pattern."

Craig felt his head turned toward the instrument panel by a will other than his own. His eyes focused on the outside pressure gauge.

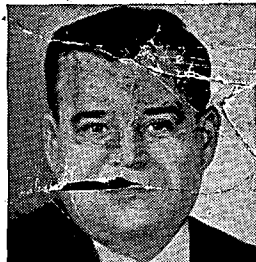
"That says I'm right," Meeral said calmly. "There was normal air pressure in her eddy space. That gauge shows better than ten pounds pressure outside the cosmicar."

Craig waited for no more. He twisted around in the seat and reached out.

But before he could touch the handle there came a knocking at the door.

\$15²⁰ an hour!

This is the average earning reported by Presto salesman **WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS**. "The sky's the limit" on Presto profits because of America's serious need for this new fire extinguishing discovery.



WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS

"Most specialty salesmen are always on the lookout for a 'natural.' The 'natural' of this decade is the **PRESTO FIRE EXTINGUISHER**... because it is handy in size, simple to operate, and in the right price range.

"For every hour I have devoted to the Presto, I find that I have earned an average of \$15.20 an hour. I am now convinced that extraordinary money can be made in this safety field. I am devoting more of my time to this product now since I have discovered that the earnings on this item are greater than any item I have handled in the past."

—William F. Wydallis
Van Wert, Ohio



CHARLES KAMA

This Presto salesman from Texas was featured as "Salesman of the Month" on the front cover of a sales magazine. He told the magazine's reporter:

"I think I've succeeded pretty well. I'm making more than a thousand dollars a month—and I haven't touched bottom yet."

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Amazed when you
Tell Them This New
Kind of Protection
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WOULDN'T YOU like to be making the kind of money William F. Wydallis is making? His story (printed at right) is just one example of the brilliant success that Presto salesmen are meeting everywhere! A Florida salesman earned \$600 in one month. An Ohio man earned \$2100 in 2 months. A New York salesman earned \$1500 in one month. A New Hampshire salesman added the Presto as a *sideline* and picked up an extra \$1800 in 20 months.

What Is the Secret?

PRESTO contains an amazing new chemical—"Chlorobromomethane" or "C.B." developed as a secret defense against fire during the war.

In comparing effectiveness of "C.B." in fighting various kinds of fires Dow Chemical Company's report states: "It has been proved that 'C.B.' is about 1.5 to 6 times as effective as other common extinguishing agents on an equal weight basis."

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